The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

SEPTEMBER 35c

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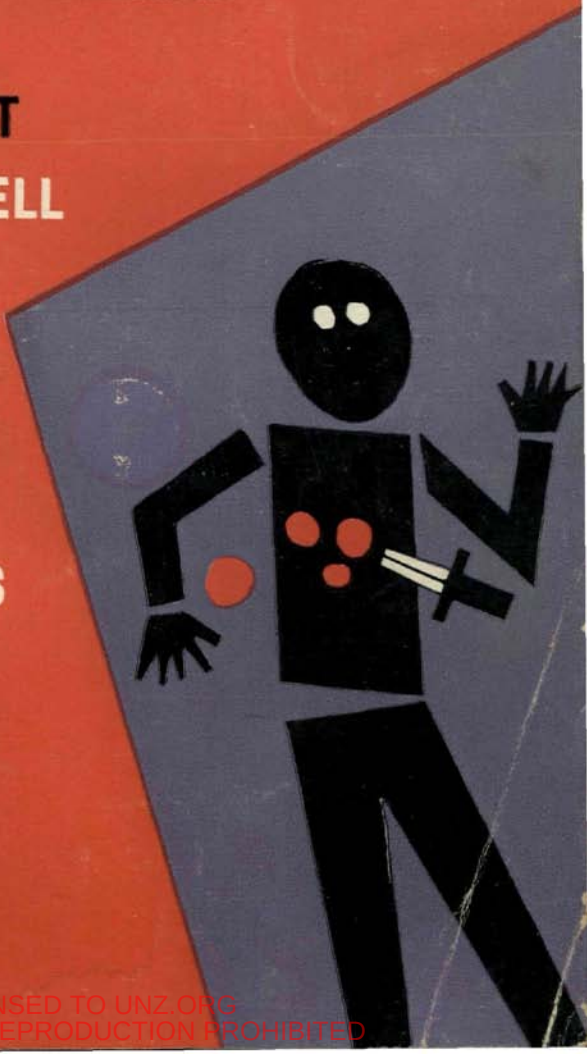

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

***including* BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

Printed in 7 editions — American, Australian, English, French, Italian, Japanese, & Portuguese

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

a new story by

AUTHOR: **EVAN HUNTER**

TITLE: ***Easy Money***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The author of* THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE *and* STRANGERS WHEN WE MEET *gives us a highly charged story of one of the dirtiest of con games—a filthy racket that the men of the 87th Precinct would have loved to crack down on with all their might . . .*

JEFFREY TALBOT KNOCKED ON THE door and waited. He stared at the metal numerals stuck to the wood, noticing that one of the screws was missing in the numeral 2. Inside, he heard a faint rustling.

He knocked again.

"Just a minute," the voice came, muffled, low.

He straightened his tie, putting the heavy valise on the floor near the door. Briefly, he went over the pitch in his mind. He looked at the name written on the slip of paper he held in his hand: O'Connor.

He smiled and put the slip of paper back into his jacket pocket. Why didn't she hurry? Or he? Or whoever was rustling around inside?

Patience, Mr. Matthews had said. A little patience goes a long way. Just remember that these people want what you have to offer. It's your job to give it to them. Be patient. But make the sale.

The door opened a crack, and Jeff edged his toe slightly forward, ready to jam into the opening should the door begin to close. Just the way Mr. Matthews had showed him.

"Yes?"

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The woman was small and old—at least, she looked old. He sensed immediately that she wasn't really as shrunken as she appeared. If only she would pull back her shoulders and stand erect; if only there wasn't that tired, pained expression in her eyes; if only her mouth would . . .

"Yes?" she asked again, her blue eyes widening slightly.

Now the pitch. Once the door is open the rest is easy, Mr. Matthews said. Just get the door open, that's the big thing.

"How do you do, Mrs. O'Connor?" he said, touching his hand to the brim of his hat.

The woman looked slightly puzzled. A thin network of frowns, spidery, lacelike, etched its way across her forehead.

"I'm from the Home Bible Company," he announced, a pleasant smile on his face.

"Oh?" the woman said.

He sensed her confusion, sensed it sweeping into the hallway, almost overpowering him. There was the smell of panic, and he remembered the smell and tried to put it out of his mind. Why on earth didn't she stand up straight?

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Well, I . . ." she hesitated.

He smiled tenderly, his eyes pleading with hers, the way Mr. Matthews had showed him. Mr. Matthews was smart, all right.

"Well," she said, clutching her housedress at the neck, her thin hand working nervously at the collar, "I suppose it would be all right." She opened the door wider and then added hastily, "I really can't afford . . ."

Jeff stepped through the door into a living-room. The shades were drawn and the room was dim.

"What a pleasant room," he said.

Mrs. O'Connor walked rapidly to a battered green couch, its upholstery worn and faded. She fluffed a cushion and said, "It's really a mess. I haven't felt too much like cleaning since . . ."

"Nonsense," Jeff lied. "It's spic and span."

He was beginning to feel it. He was doing all right. His first approach, and he was doing all right. Now was the time to move in.

He sat down on the couch while Mrs. O'Connor went to the windows and lifted the shades. The couch was hard. He could feel the springs when he sat down.

He glanced briefly around the room. A radio set stood in the corner. It was an old-fashioned set, with a cabinet that had sliding doors. Both doors were closed, as if the radio hadn't been played for a long while. On top of the radio a photograph in a leather frame smiled across at Jeff.

The man in the photograph had white hair and a broad grin. His jaw was solid, like a square slab of marble. His eyes held a gay twinkle under the shaggy white brows.

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"Now," Jeff began, turning away from the picture.

"I do hope you're not going to sell me anything," Mrs. O'Connor said, and Jeff noticed the faint Irish brogue for the first time, like a charming splash of green on her tongue. He wished again that she would straighten her shoulders, perhaps smile out of her tired blue eyes. "I haven't any money to spare.

Jeff opened the suitcase and took out the Bible. He held it on the palm of his hand, the way Matthews told him to, the gold letters facing Mrs. O'Connor.

The Holy Bible.

He paused a moment for effect. The Bible was black, bound in handsome leather, the gold lettering done in Old English stamped deep into the cover.

"It's very nice," Mrs. O'Connor said, "but I don't think I need . . ."

Jeff flipped open the cover quickly and showed Mrs. O'Connor the flyleaf.

There, in attractive script, carefully hand-lettered on the heavy paper was the name: *John O'Connor.*

Mrs. O'Connor's mouth rounded into a little "O," but no sound escaped her lips. Her hand went to her throat, and he watched it flutter there in panic. She gasped, then passed her hand over her eyes, as if clearing away a dreadful vision.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" he said in awed tones.

Mrs. O'Connor shook her head meaninglessly, and then she nodded.

"Your husband ordered it," Jeff said. That was what Mr. Matthews said would always clinch it.

"My husband," she whispered. There was no expression in her voice. A mist had risen to her eyes, moistening the blue, lending an artificial sparkle where there was none.

"Yes," Jeff also whispered. "Before he died."

It was almost as if he'd told her for the first time that her husband was dead. She jerked back involuntarily, the thin hands completely out of control now, the tears springing to her eyes.

"John," she said, her voice breaking, the sobs overwhelming her.

"There, there," Jeff said. He rose and put his arm around her quaking shoulders. "There, now. There." He felt rather foolish—felt, too, that he was watching a stranger go through the routine, almost as though he were watching Mr. Matthews when he'd gone through the same act with the Italian woman.

"There," he consoled.

She drew away from him. "I'm . . . sorry. It's difficult to . . . get used to."

The Bible. Never let them forget the Bible.

"He wanted this," Jeff said, placing the Bible on the couch. "He ordered it. Before he died."

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He watched her eyes again, waiting for the tears. But there were none this time. Instead, she touched the Bible with reverent fingers, almost caressing it.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you so much for bringing it."

He cleared his throat uncomfortably.

"Only ten dollars," he said.

She didn't understand. He hadn't said it correctly. He hadn't said it the way Mr. Matthews taught him, the way Mr. Matthews had said it to the Italian woman.

"John saved," she said, misunderstanding. "He probably saved."

In a quiet voice Jeff said, "It isn't paid for yet, Mrs. O'Connor."

He felt momentary panic, and then guilt. He struggled against the feelings and deliberately put them down. This was easy money. The Bible was worth ten dollars any day of the week. And he got five out of every ten. Easy money.

Mrs. O'Connor touched the Bible once more, lovingly. "Ten dollars," she crooned.

"There's no obligation, of course," he said, reaching for the book. "That is, if you don't want it, we couldn't possibly . . ."

"Oh, I'll take it," she protested. "He ordered it. It was what he wanted."

"Well, yes, but if . . ."

"No, no, I'll pay for it." She paused. "Only, well, you see I haven't that much just now."

"You can pay it in four weekly payments, if you like. Two fifty each time."

"Yes," she said, as though he had just offered her salvation. "Oh, yes!"

He busied himself with his order pad, writing her name and address. He checked a box marked "Installment."

"That'll be two fifty," he said.

She walked into the next room, and he heard the protesting squeak of a drawer, the faint click of a purse being opened. He heard the jingle of coins. Then silence.

He waited.

Another drawer squeaked open, and he heard the rustle of clothing, then a tin can being pried open. The drawer shuffled shut, and Mrs. O'Connor returned.

"Here," she said, and she reached for the Bible.

He took the money in his left hand and casually covered the book with his right.

Then he slipped the money into his pocket and picked up the book. She stared at him, the fear working its way into her eyes again. He saw what was mirrored there, and turned away.

"I'll be back next week," he said pleasantly. He gave her the receipt. "I'd like to leave the book, but you understand, Mrs. O'Connor. So many people have . . . well, no scruples. We're forced to take precautions, you know."

"Yes," she said, disappointment in her voice and in her eyes.

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"I'll see you next week," Jeff said putting the Bible back in the suitcase.

She held the door open for him, and as he started down the stairs he heard it close like a whimper behind him.

The following Monday, after a week of selling, he sat in the big leather chair in the reception room, waiting to see Mr. Matthews. The receptionist was working on a crossword puzzle, her legs crossed, one shoe swinging back and forth, back and forth.

It's a job, Jeff thought. It's a better job than any I've ever had. It pays well. It's a job.

And then, abruptly, he thought, "But I'd quit if I were half a man."

His own thought startled him, and he glanced up nervously, almost expecting the receptionist to be watching him. She was still busy with the puzzle, her pencil stuck thoughtfully between her lips.

"How much longer?" he asked, twisting in the chair.

"Keep your shirt on," she said. Her voice had a twang in it. He didn't like her voice. She glanced up at the clock.

"Jeepers," she said, "time for lunch." She got up quickly, perching a little hat atop her head. "Be a dear and take any calls, will you?" she said over her shoulder.

I should have said no, he thought after she was gone. That's her job, not mine. My job is selling Bibles. Easy money. The easy way out.

Well, so what? he asked himself. If I don't take these suckers, somebody else will. So it's the easy way, the coward's way.

The word burned in his mind. Coward.

It was funny the way a man could forget. Or did he really forget? Somewhere, deep in the folds of memory, the picture would always persist, dimly sometimes, but it was always there, always quick to flare up.

A sudden cold sweat broke out over his upper lip. He fumbled for his handkerchief and wiped the sweat away. But he couldn't wipe away the picture in his mind. He looked at the reception desk, at the clock ticking on the far wall, at Mr. Matthews' closed door.

The picture was still there . . .

"Jeff!" MacC. was yelling, "Jeff, you can't stay here. They're raking the beach."

A sprinkle of slugs playfully kicked up sand three feet before their eyes.

"Leave me alone!" Jeff shouted.

The machine gun began probing in earnest, the sand rising in angry spurts around them. MacC. dropped his gun in the sand and stood up, his tall form towering over the protection of the dune. He rolled Jeff over, struggling for a firmer grip. Jeff stared up into his face, watched the sweat there, the strain.

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And then, magically, he watched in fascination as the dust spouted on MacC.'s blouse. Just little spurts of dust—ping, ping, ping, right across his chest. And right behind the dust the red blossomed, spreading from the little holes like flowers opening in the morning.

MacC.'s mouth opened. He looked at Jeff with accusing eyes that suddenly rolled and went lifeless.

The machine gun kept chattering ceaselessly just beyond the dune . . .

"Well, Jeff!" It was Matthews' voice. "Sorry to keep you waiting. Come in, come in."

Jeff mopped his face with the handkerchief, gripped Matthews' hand and pumped it vigorously.

In the office Jeff sat next to Matthews' desk.

"Eighteen sales in one week," Matthews said. "Good work, my boy!"

"Thanks," Jeff said. He was thinking again of the fear in Mrs. O'Connor's eyes. He shrugged the thought away and tried to concentrate on what Matthews was saying.

"And this is only the beginning, Jeff, only the beginning. You'll be lighting your cigarettes with dollar bills soon."

He chuckled, the fat on his jowls wiggling.

Suddenly he became very businesslike. "You understand, of course, that it's to your advantage to get all the money the first time."

"It's not easy," Jeff said. Again he heard Mrs. O'Connor rummaging through her dresser, looking for two dollars and fifty cents.

"Of course not," Matthews agreed smoothly. He was puffing a cigar, the band still on it. The gold of the cigar band rested against the gold of the signet ring on his finger. A ring on a cigar, a ring on a fat finger.

"You should play up the leaving a little more," Matthews suggested. "Make them feel that if they don't give you the whole ten right then and there, it's all off. Get me?"

"I'd lose the sale that way," Jeff argued.

"Possibly. But a lot of these people are holding out on you. They've got the sawbuck, but they just don't want to part with it."

Did Mrs. O'Connor have the sawbuck?

"Well, I'll try," Jeff mumbled uncomfortably.

"I know you will," Matthews said, a grin flashing across his fleshy features.

The next day Jeff got five new customers. And then he went to collect the second installment from Mrs. O'Connor.

He stood in the narrow hallway, the same feeling of oppression bearing down on him. Across the hall, behind a closed door marked 2F, angry voices shouted at each other. Jeff knocked again, and the

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door next to Mrs. O'Connor's opened.

"She ain't in," the boy said. He had rumpled blond hair and a nose spattered with freckles.

Jeff smiled and asked, "Do you know when she'll be back?"

"Nope."

"Did she leave any messages?"

"Nope."

Jeff stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Have you got any idea where she went?"

"Sure."

"Well, where?"

The smell of boiling cabbage drifted up the stairwell.

"To work," the boy said, and he started to close the door.

Jeff's foot darted out and jammed itself in the crack.

"Where does she work, sonny?" he asked.

"Next door. She helps the landlady. Mrs. Canning."

"Thanks," Jeff said.

"That's all right," the boy answered.

Jeff started down the stairs, the cabbage smell growing stronger when he reached the ground floor. He walked into the street hastily and looked to either side of the tenement. A small grocery store, its windows packed with fat, round salamis and colorful beer ads, was on the left, and another tenement on the right. He walked to the latter and climbed the steps, past a woman sitting on the stoop rocking a baby carriage.

He glanced at the doorbells and rang the one marked "Superintendent."

"You looking for Mrs. Canning?" the woman with the carriage asked.

"Indirectly," Jeff said. "I'm really looking for Mrs. O'Connor."

"Mary O'Connor?" the woman asked.

"Yes," Jeff said, almost astonished that Mrs. O'Connor had a first name, even though he had written it on the receipt.

"You'll find her on the third floor."

"Thanks."

The baby in the carriage began to cry as he walked into the dark interior and started up the stairs. The building was pretty much like the one he'd just left: the stairway was narrow, the banister wobbly, the walls full of cracks, and here and there huge chunks of plaster had fallen down leaving large gray holes in the ceiling. Assorted smells of crowded living reached out to embrace him as he winced slightly and climbed the badly lit stairs.

On the third floor he found Mary O'Connor.

She was on her hands and knees. Her hair was stuck to her forehead. She dipped her brush into the bucket and sloshed water onto the floor.

Wearily, she bent over her work. Jeff watched her, embarrassed, and then he cleared his throat.

Mary O'Connor looked up, and

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puzzlement crossed her face. Then her eyes grew large, and Jeff thought she was going to cry. Instead, she smiled eagerly, scrambled to her feet, and began drying her hands on her apron.

"Hello," she said, "I've been waiting for you."

"Hello," Jeff said. "I had quite a time finding you."

"I took a job," she said. "I . . ." She seemed to debate telling him more than she had to. "I took a job."

"That's nice," Jeff said.

"'Tisn't much," she explained, "but it helps. John, he didn't leave much. I mean, not that it was his fault."

"Of course not," Jeff agreed. He reached into his pocket for his receipt pad.

"Five dollars a day, Mrs. Canning gives me," Mary O'Connor said.

Jeff's fingers fumbled with the pad. Five dollars a day!

She reached into the pocket of her apron and pulled out two crumpled dollar bills and two quarters.

"Here it is," she said, "just the way you said."

Jeff took the money, still thinking of her salary. Quickly he made the entry on his pad and handed her a receipt.

"Thank you," he mumbled.

Mrs. O'Connor smiled weakly. "You'll be sure to be back next week?"

"Yes. Of course."

"And then there'll be just one more week until I get the Bible."

"Yes."

She smiled in satisfaction, got down on her knees again, and dipped the brush into the water.

Jeff left her that way—on her hands and knees over a wet floor. He walked down the three flights of stairs, not looking back. He couldn't chase a persistent thought out of his head.

Mrs. O'Connor scrubbed floors for a full day to get five dollars. To earn the same amount all he had to do was sell her a Bible that her husband never ordered.

That week his new sales went up to twenty-three.

Once—just once—he thought of quitting. And then he thought of the money again. It was too easy. He'd been a shoe clerk for a time, holding sweaty feet in his hands, flattering customers, cursing them when they were gone. And once he worked in an office, and the boss would come out every ten minutes, look over his desk, clear his throat, and go back into the office again. And then the restaurant job, washing dishes, and the stock clerk job, and driving the truck, and the countless other jobs since the Army.

No, it was too much. He was tired of sweating, tired of being afraid. He was going to take it easy now. He was going to light his cigarettes with dollar bills . . .

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Matthews was in rare form that Wednesday.

"How do you like the job?" he asked.

"Fine," Jeff said in a low voice.

"One hundred and fifteen dollars in a single week! That's mighty nice money, boy, mighty nice money."

"Is it?" Jeff asked.

"I'll say it is," Matthews assured him. "And this is only the beginning, boy, only the beginning. Wait'll I tell you the latest wrinkle."

Jeff sat in the leather chair beside Matthews' desk.

"Yes, my boy, a new wrinkle. The obituaries in the morning papers are fine, and we'll still use them, of course. People are dying every day, you know." He chuckled noisily.

Jeff knew someone who had died—on a slug-spattered beach.

Matthews puffed on his cigar, warming up to his news.

I guarantee a hundred sales a week, Jeff. With this new wrinkle there'll be no more duds. These people will think you're doing them a favor, a big favor."

Suddenly Jeff didn't want to hear Matthews' new scheme. He wanted to be left alone. He didn't want any more pep talks. He'd heard a pep talk once, a pep talk punctuated with machine-gun bursts. He'd quit then, and he was quitting now, but he didn't want to be told about it.

He was nothing but a con man—a swindler and cheat playing on sympathy and respect for the dead.

"The casualty lists," Matthews announced proudly. "More and more are being released every day. The War Department is really just catching up with itself."

Casualty lists. Somewhere in the back of Jeff's mind staccato chattering began. Casualty lists.

"Killed in action," Matthews said. "As soon as the names are released we snatch them up—and bingo!"

Ping, ping, ping, right across his chest. Little spurts of dust.

"Your son ordered this, ma'm, asking us to collect for it over here." Matthews grinned and winked at Jeff.

Jeff gripped the sides of his chair, his knuckles white.

"What?" Matthews continued in mock surprise. "Your son was killed in action? Oh, I'm terribly sorry, I had no idea. Then we spring the Bible with the kid's name in it and . . ."

Matthews stopped suddenly.

"What's the matter, boy?"

Jeff reached out and grabbed Matthews by the lapels of his coat.

"You filthy pig," he snarled. "You dirty filthy pig. Casualty lists!"

With sudden fury he threw his fist into Matthews' jaw, staggering him backward, smashing him into the desk, knocking his box of expensive cigars to the floor.

"Just a minute, boy," Matthews

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squealed, his hands out in front of him. "Just a minute now, Jeff."

Jeff's eyes blazed. His hands ripped at the lapels again, and he lifted Matthews and threw him against the wall.

"I quit, you stinking scum! I quit, do you hear? I'm through, finished! I've stopped doing your filthy work, do you understand?"

Jeff was shouting now. He threw open the black suitcase and began searching among the books, finally coming on what he wanted. He stood up then and faced Matthews who was crouching in the far corner of the room.

"Expect the police," he said simply. Then he left.

He felt a little happier as he gave the boy the envelope with the five dollars, and the Bible. The note said, "A mistake has been made, Mrs. O'Connor. This Bible was already paid for. A long time ago."

Perhaps he was still a coward. A more courageous man would have gone up to face Mary O'Connor personally. But when he saw the boy disappear into the building, he felt a lot happier.

Happier than he'd felt in a long time.

COMING ATTRACTIONS . . .

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ELLERY QUEEN**

TITLE: ***The Case Against Carroll***

TYPE: Detective Novelette

DETECTIVE: Ellery Queen

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Was ever a man so damned by circumstantial evidence as John Carroll? Everything pointed to his guilt—motive, weapon, opportunity, fingerprints . . .*

CARROLL FELT THE HEAT THROUGH his shoes as he got out of the taxi. In the swollen twilight even the Park across Fifth Avenue had a look of suffering. It made him worry again about how Helena was taking the humidity.

"What?" Carroll said, reaching for his wallet. It was a thirty-sixth birthday present from Helena, and he usually challenged taxi drivers to identify the leather, which was elephant hide. But tonight's hackie was glowering at the slender graystone building with it fineboned black balconies.

"I said," the driver said, "that's your house?"

"Yes." Carroll immediately felt angry. The lie of convenience had its uses, but on days like this it stung. The graystone had been erected in the Seventies by Helena's great-grandfather, and it belonged to her.

"Air conditioned, no doubt," the man said, wiping out his ear. "How would you like to live in one of them de luxe East Side hotboxes on a night like this?"

"No, thank you," Carroll said, remembering.

"I got four kids down there, not to mention my old lady. What do you think of that?"

Carroll overtipped him.

He used his key on the bronze street door with a sense of sanc-

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tuary. The day had been bad all around, especially at Hunt, West & Carroll, Attorneys-at-Law. Miss Mallowan, his secretary, had chosen this day to throw her monthly fainting spell; the new clerk had wasted three hours conscientiously looking up the wrong citations; Meredith Hunt, playing the senior partner with a heavy hand, had been at his foulest; and Tully West, ordinarily the most urbane of men, had been positively short-tempered at finding himself with only one change of shirt in the office.

And trickling through the day, acid-like, had been Carroll's worry about Helena. He had telephoned twice, and she had been extra-cheery both times. When Helena sounded extra-cheery, she was covering up something.

Had she found out?

But that wasn't possible.

Unless Tully . . . But Carroll shook his head, wincing. Tully West couldn't know. His code coupled snooping with using the wrong fork and other major crimes.

It's the weather, Carroll decided fatuously; and he stepped into his wife's house.

Indoors, he felt a little better. The house with its crystal chandeliers, Italian marble, and shimmering floors was as cameo-cool as Helena herself—as all the Vanowens must have been, judging from the Sargents lording it over the walls. He had never stopped feeling grateful that they were all defunct except Helena. The Vanowens went back to the patroons, while he was the son of a track walker for the New York transit system who had been killed by a subway train while tilting a bottle on the job. Breeding had been the Vanowens' catchword; they would not have cared for Helena's choice of husband.

John Carroll deposited his hat and brief case in the foyer closet and trudged upstairs, letting his wet palm squeak along the satiny rail.

Helena was in the upstairs sitting room, reading *Winnie the Pooh* for the umpteenth time to Breckie and Louanne.

And she was in the wheelchair again.

Carroll watched his wife's face from the archway as she made the absurd Eeyore sounds the children never tired of. Through the stab of angry helplessness he felt the old wonder. Her slender body was bunched, tight in defense, against the agony of her arthritis-racked legs, but that delicate face under its coif of auburn was as serene as a nun's. Only he knew what a price she paid for that serenity.

"Daddy. It's Daddy!"

Two rockets flew at him. Laden down with sleepered arms and legs, Carroll went to his wife and kissed her.

"Now, darling," Helena said.

"How bad is it?" he growled.

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"Not bad. John, you're soaked. Did you have to work so late in this swelter?"

"I suppose that's why you're in the wheel chair."

"I've had Mrs. Poole keep dinner hot for you."

"Mommy let us stay up because we were so *good,*" Louanne said. "Now can we have the choc-o-late, Daddy?"

"We weren't so *very* good," Breckie said. "See, see, Louanne, I told you Daddy wouldn't forget!"

"We'll help you take your shower." Helena strained forward in the wheel chair. "Breckie angel, your bottom's sticking out. John, really. Couldn't you have made it Life Savers today?"

"It's bad, isn't it?"

"A little," Helena admitted, smiling.

A little! Carroll thought as they all went upstairs in the elevator he had had installed two years before, when Helena's condition had become chronic. A little—when even at the best of times she had to drag about like an old woman.

He showered in full view of his admiring family, impotently aware of the health in his long, dark body.

When he pattered back to the bedroom he found a shaker of martinis and, on his bed, fresh linen and his favorite slacks and jacket.

"What's the matter, John?"

"I didn't think it showed," Carroll said tenderly.

He kissed her on the chocolate smudge left by Breckie's fingers.

Like a character in a bad TV drama, Hunt came with the thunder and the rain.

Carroll was surprised. He was also embarrassed by the abrupt way the children stopped chattering as the lawyer's thickset figure appeared in the dining-room doorway.

"Meredith." Carroll half rose. "I thought you were on your way to Chicago."

"I'm headed for La Guardia now," Hunt said. "Legs again, Helena?"

"Yes. Isn't it a bore?" Helena glanced at her housekeeper, who was in the foyer holding Hunt's wet things at arm's length. "Mr. Hunt will take coffee with us, Mrs. Poole."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"No, Ma'am," Meredith Hunt said. "But I thank you. *And* the Carroll small-fry. Up kind of late, aren't you?"

Breckie and Louanne edged stealthily toward their mother's chair.

"We like to wait up for our daddy," Helena smiled, drawing them to her. "How's Felicia, Meredith? I must call her as soon as this lets up a bit."

"Don't. My wife is being very Latin American these days."

Something was terribly wrong. Looking back on the day, John Carroll felt another thrill of alarm.

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Helena said extra-cheerily, "Way past your bedtime, bunny rabbits! Kiss your father and say good night to Mr. Hunt."

She herded them out with her wheel chair. As she turned the chair into the foyer, she glanced swiftly at her husband. Then she said something crisp to Mrs. Poole, and they all disappeared behind the clang of the elevator door.

Carroll said, "Life's little surprises. You wanted to talk to me, Meredith?"

"Definitely." Hunt's large teeth glistened.

"Let's go up to my study."

"I can talk here."

Carroll looked at him. "What's on your mind?"

"You're a crook," Hunt said.

Carroll sat down. He reached with concentration for the crystal cigarette box on the table.

"When did you find out, Meredith?"

"I knew I was making a mistake the day I let Tully West pull that *noblesse oblige* act for Helena and sweet-talk me into taking you into the firm." The burly lawyer sauntered about the dining room, eying the marble fireplace, the paintings, the crystal cabinets, the heirloom silver. "You can't make a blue ribbon entry out of an alley accident, I always say. The trouble with Tully and Helena, John, is that they're sentimental idiots. They really believe in democracy."

The flame of the lighter danced very red. Carroll put the cigarette down, unlit.

"I wish you'd let me explain, Meredith."

"So I've kept an eye on you," Hunt said, not pausing in his stroll. "And especially on the Eakins Trust. It's going to give me a lot of satisfaction to show my blue-blood partner just how and when his mongrel protégé misappropriated twenty thousand dollars' worth of trust securities."

"Will you let me explain?"

"Explain away. Horses? The market?" Hunt swung about. A nerve in the heavy flesh beneath his right eye was jumping. "A woman?"

"Keep your voice down, Meredith."

"A woman. Sure. When a man like you is married to a—"

"Don't!" Carroll said. Then he said, "Does Tully know?"

"Not yet."

"It was my brother Harry. He got into a dangerous mess involving some hard character and he had to get out in a hurry. He needed twenty thousand dollars to square himself, and he came to me for it."

"And you stole it for him."

"I told him I didn't have it. I don't have it. My take from the firm just about keeps our heads above water. It's my income that runs this house, Meredith. Or did you think I let Helena's money feed me, too? Anyway, Harry

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threatened to go to Helena for it."

"And, of course," Hunt said, showing his teeth again, "you couldn't let him do that."

"No," Carroll said. "No, Meredith, I couldn't. I don't expect you to understand why. Helena wouldn't hesitate to give me any amount I asked for, but . . . Well, I had no way of borrowing a wad like that overnight except to go to you or to Tully. Tully was somewhere in northern Canada hunting, and to go to you . . ." Carroll paused. When he looked up he said, "So I took it from the Eakins Trust, proving your point."

Meredith Hunt nodded with enjoyment.

Carroll pushed himself erect on his fists. "I've got to ask you to give me time. I'll replace the funds by the first of the year. It won't happen again, Meredith. Harry's in Mexico, and he won't be back. It won't happen again. The first of the year." He swallowed. "Please."

"Monday," Hunt said.

"What?"

"This is Friday. I'll give you till Monday morning to make up the defalcation. You have sixty hours to keep from arrest, prison, and disbarment. If you replace the money I'll drop the matter to protect the firm. In any event, of course, you're through at the office."

"Monday." Carroll laughed. "Why not tonight? It would be just as merciful."

"You can get the money from your wife. Or from Tully, if he's stupid enough to give it to you."

"I won't drag Helena into this!" Carroll heard his voice rising, and he pulled it down with an effort. "Or Tully—I value his friendship too much. I got myself into this jam, and all I'm asking is the chance to get myself out."

"That's your problem. I'm being very generous, under the circumstances." All the lines of Hunt's well-preserved face sagged as his cold eyes flamed with sudden heat. "Especially since the Eakins Trust isn't the only property you haven't been able to keep your hands off."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Your sex life is your own business as long as you don't poach on mine. Stay away from my wife."

Carroll's fist caught Hunt's big chin. Hunt staggered. Then he lowered his head and came around the table like a bull. They wrestled against the table, knocking a Sèvres cup to the floor.

"That's a lie," Carroll whispered. "I've never laid a finger on Felicia . . . on any woman but Helena."

"I've seen Felicia look at you," Hunt panted. His head came up, butting. Carroll fell down.

"John. Meredith."

The wheel chair was in the doorway. Helena was as pale as her husband.

Carroll got to his feet. "Go back, Helena. Go upstairs."

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"Meredith. Please leave."

The big lawyer straightened, fumbling with his expensive silk tie. He was glaring in a sort of victory. Then he went into the foyer, took his hat and topcoat from the chair in which Mrs. Poole had deposited them, and quietly left.

"John, what did he say to you?" Helena was as close to fear as she ever got. "What happened?"

Carroll began to pick up the fragments of the shattered cup. But his hands were shaking so uncontrollably that he stopped.

"Oh, darling, you promised never to lose your temper again this way—"

Carroll said nothing.

"It's not good for you." She reached over and pulled his head down to her breast. "Whatever he said, dearest, it's not worth . . ."

He patted her, trying to pull away.

"John, come to bed?"

"No. I've got to cool off."

"Darling—"

"I'll walk it off."

"But it's pouring!"

Carroll snatched his hat and topcoat from the foyer closet and plunged out of the house. He sloshed down Fifth Avenue in the rain and fog, almost running.

The next morning John Carroll got out of the taxi before the Hunt house on East 61st Street like a man dreaming. The streets had been washed clean by the downpour of the night before, and the sun was already hot, but he felt dirty and cold. He pressed the Hunt bell with a sense of doom, a vague warning of things he tried not to imagine. He shivered and jabbed at the bell again, irritably this time.

A maid with a broad Indian face finally opened the door. She led him in silence up to Felicia Hunt's rooms on the second floor. Tully West was already there, thoughtfully contemplating the postage-stamp rear garden from Felicia's picture window. West was as tall and fleshless as a Franciscan monk —an easy man with an iron-gray crewcut and unnoticeable clothes.

Carroll nodded to his partner and dropped into one of the capacious Spanish chairs Felicia surrounded herself with. "Crosstown traffic held me up. Felicia, what's this all about?"

Felicia de los Santos was in her dramatic mood this morning. She had clothed her dark plump beauty in a violently gay gown; she was already at work fingering her talisman, a ruby-and-emerald-crusted locket that had belonged to a Bourbon queen. She was the daughter of a Latin-American diplomat of Castilian blood, she had been educated in Europe after a high-walled childhood, and she was hopelessly torn between the Spanish tradition of the submissive wife and the feminism she had found in the United States. What Felicia de los Santos

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had seen in Meredith Hunt, an American primitive twice her age, Carroll had never fathomed.

"Meredith is missing." She had a charming accent.

"Msising? Isn't he in Chicago?"

"The Michaelson people say no." Tully West's witty, rather glacial voice was not amused today. "They phoned Felicia this morning after trying to reach our office. Meredith never got there."

"I don't understand that." Carroll felt his forehead; he had a pounding headache. "He stopped by last night about half-past nine and said he was on his way to the airport."

"He wasn't on the plane, John." Hunt's wife seemed more nervous than alarmed. "Tully just telephoned La Guardia."

"All planes were grounded from about eight p.m. yesterday until three in the morning by the fog. Meredith checked in at the field all right, found his flight delayed, and left word at the desk that he'd wait around the airport. But when the fog cleared they couldn't find him." West sat Felicia Hunt down on her silk divan, gingerly. She appealed to him with her moist black eyes as if for understanding, but he turned to Carroll. "You say, John, he stopped by last night?"

"For just a few minutes. He didn't mention anything that would explain this." Carroll shut his eyes.

Felicia Hunt twisted her locket. "He's left me—deserted me."

Tully West looked shocked. "Meredith would as soon leave his wallet. My dear girl!"

The maid said from the doorway, "Senora. The police."

Carroll turned sharply.

Three men were in the doorway behind the Indian maid. One was broad and powerful; another was small, gray, and wiry; and the third was tall and young.

The broad man said, "Mrs. Hunt? Sergeant Velie. This is Inspector Queen." He did not bother to introduce the tall young man. "We've got bad news for you."

"My husband—"

"An officer found him around six thirty this morning over on East 58th, near the Queensboro Bridge, in a parked Thunderbird. He was spread across the wheel with a slug in his brain."

She got to her feet, clutching the pendant. Then her eyes turned over and she pitched forward.

West and Carroll both caught her before their mouths could close. They hauled her onto the divan and Carroll began to chafe her hands. The maid ran to the bathroom.

"Ever the delicate touch, Velie," the tall young man remarked from the doorway. "Couldn't you have hit her over the head?"

Sergeant Velie ignored him. "I forgot to mention he's dead. Who are you?"

"I'm Tully West, that's John Car-

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roll." West was very pale. "We're Hunt's law partners. Mrs. Hunt phoned us this morning when her husband failed to show up in Chicago for a business appointment. He was to have taken the eleven p.m. plane—"

"That's already been checked." The small gray man was watching the maid wave a bottle of smelling salts under Felicia Hunt's little nose. "Hunt didn't come back home last night? Phone or anything?"

"Mrs. Hunt says not."

"Was he supposed to be traveling alone?"

"Yes."

"Make such trips often?"

"Yes. Hunt was outside man for the firm."

"Was he in the habit of driving his car to airports?"

"Yes. He'd park it and pick it up on his return."

"Carrying any valuables last night?"

"Just cash for the trip, as far as I know. And a dispatch case containing some papers and a change of linen."

Felicia Hunt shuddered and opened her eyes. The maid eased her expertly back on the divan and slipped a pillow under her head. The young widow lay there like Goya's Duchess, fingering her locket. Carroll straightened.

"Suicide," Tully West said, and he cleared his throat. "It was suicide?"

"Not on your tintype," Inspector Queen said. "Hunt was murdered, and when we identify the Colt Woodsman we found in the car, we'll know who murdered him. Until we do, any suggestions?"

Carroll glared around helplessly. Then he clapped his hand over his mouth and ran into the bathroom. They heard him gagging.

"Was Mr. Carroll unusually fond of Mr. Hunt?" asked the tall young man politely.

"No," Tully West said. "I mean —oh, damn it all!"

"Detectives will be talking to you people later in the day." The Inspector nodded at his sergeant, said, "Come along, Ellery" to the tall young man, and then he marched out with his old man's stiff-kneed bounce. . .

"Come in, please." Inspector Queen did not look up from the report he was reading.

John Carroll came into the office between Tully West and a detective. The partners' faces were gray.

"Have a seat."

The detective left. In a rivuleted leather chair at one corner of his father's office Ellery sprawled over a cigarette. A small fan was going behind the old man, ruffling his white hair. It made the only noise in the room.

"See here," Tully West said frigidly. "Mr. Carroll's been interrogated from hell to breakfast by precinct detectives, Homicide Squad

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men, the Deputy Chief Inspector in charge of Manhattan East, and detectives of the Homicide Bureau. He's submitted without a murmur to fingerprinting. He's spent a whole morning in the Criminal Courts Building being taken apart piece by piece by an Assistant District Attorney who apparently thinks he can parlay this case into a seat in Congress. May I suggest that you people either fish or cut bait?"

The Inspector laid aside the report. He settled back in his swivel chair, regarding the Ivy League lawyer in a friendly way. "Any special reason, Mr. West, why you insisted on coming along this morning?"

"Why?" West's lips were jammed together. "Is there an objection to my being here?"

"No." The old man looked at Carroll. "Mr. Carroll, I'm throwing away the book on this one. You'll notice there's not even a stenographer present. Maybe if we're frank with each other we can cut corners and save everybody a lot of grief. We've been on this homicide for five days now, and I'm going to tell you what we've come up with."

"But why me?" John Carroll's voice came out all cracked.

West touched his partner's arm. "You'll have to forgive Mr. Carroll, Inspector. He's never learned not to look a gift horse in the mouth. Shut up, John, and listen."

The old man swiveled creakily to look out his dusty window. "As far as we can reconstruct the crime, Hunt's killer must have followed him to La Guardia last Friday night. A bit past midnight Hunt reclaimed his car at the parking lot and drove off, in spite of the fact that he'd told the airline clerk at ten-thirty that he'd wait around for the fog to lift. It's our theory that the killer met him at La Guardia and talked him into taking a ride, maybe on a plea of privacy. That would mean that after reclaiming his car Hunt picked the killer up and they drove off together.

"We have no way of knowing how long they cruised around before crossing the Queensboro Bridge into Manhattan, but at about one forty-five a.m. a patrol car passed the Thunderbird on East 58th, parked where it was later found with Hunt's body in it. The Assistant Medical Examiner says Hunt was killed between two and four a.m. Saturday, so when the patrol car passed at a quarter to two, Hunt and his killer must have been sitting in it, still talking.

"Now." Inspector Queen swiveled back to eye Carroll. "Item one: Hunt was shot to death with a bullet from the Colt Woodsman .22 automatic found beside the body. That pistol, Mr. Carroll, is registered in your name."

Carroll's face went grayer. He made an instinctive movement, but West touched his arm again.

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"Item two: motive. There's nothing to indicate it could have had anything to do with Hunt's trip, or any client. Your firm doesn't practise criminal law, your clients are conservative corporations, and the Chicago people had every reason to want Hunt to stay healthy—he was going to save them a couple of million dollars in a tax-refund suit against the government. Mr. West himself has gone over the contents of Hunt's dispatch case, and he says nothing is missing. Robbery? Hunt's secretary got him three hundred dollars from the bank Friday for his trip, and well over that amount was found in his wallet. Hunt's Movado wrist watch and jade ring were found on him.

"That's the way it stood till Monday morning. Then Hunt himself tipped us off to the motive. He wrote us a letter."

"Hunt *what?*" Carroll cried.

"By way of Miss Connor, his secretary. She found it in the office mail on Monday morning. Hunt wrote it on airline stationery from La Guardia on Friday night and dropped it into a mailbox there, probably before his killer showed up.

"It was a note to his secretary," the Inspector went on, "instructing her that if anything should happen to him over the week-end she was to deliver the enclosure, a sealed envelope, to the police. Miss Connor brought it right in."

West said, "Good old Meredith." He looked disgusted.

"Hunt's letter to us, Mr. Carroll, says that he visited your home on Fifth Avenue before going to the airport Friday evening—tells us why, tells us about your fight . . . incidentally clearing up the reason for the bruise on his mouth. So, you see, we know all about the twenty grand you lifted from that trust fund, and Hunt's ultimatum to you a few hours before he was knocked off. He even mentioned his suspicions about you and Mrs. Hunt." The Inspector added mildly, "That's two pretty good motives, Mr. Carroll. Care to change your statement?"

Carroll's mouth was open. Then he jumped up. "It's all a horrible misunderstanding," he stammered. "There's never been a thing between Felicia Hunt and me—"

"John." West pulled him down. "Inspector, Meredith Hunt was stupidly jealous of his wife. He even accused me on occasion of making passes at her. I can't speak about Mrs. Hunt's feelings, but John Carroll is the most devoted married man I know. He's crazy about his wife and children."

"And the defalcation?" the Inspector murmured.

"John's told me all about that. His no-good brother was in serious trouble and John foolishly borrowed the money from one of the trusts our firm administers to get the brute out of it. I've already re-

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placed it from my personal funds. Any talk of theft or prosecution is ridiculous. If I'd known about Meredith's ultimatum I'd have been tempted to pop him one myself. We all have our weak moments under stress. I've known John Carroll intimately for almost ten years. I can and do vouch for his fundamental honesty."

Ellery's voice said from his corner, "And when exactly did Mr. Carroll tell you about his weak moment, Mr. West?"

The lawyer was startled. Then he turned around and said with a smile, "I don't believe I'll answer that."

"The gun," Inspector Queen prompted.

"It's John's, Inspector, of course. He's a Reserve officer, and he likes to keep up his marksmanship. We both do a bit of target shooting now and then at a gun club we belong to downtown, and John keeps the target pistol in his desk at the office. Anyone could have lifted that Woodsman and walked off with it. The fact that John keeps it in the office is known to dozens of people."

"I see." The old man's tone specified nothing. "Now let's get to last Friday night. We'll play it as if you've never been questioned, Mr. Carroll. I suppose you can establish just where you were between two and four a.m. last Saturday?"

Carroll put his head between his hands and laughed.

"Well, can you?"

"I'll try to explain again, Inspector," Carroll said, straightening up. "When I lose my temper, as I did with Meredith on Friday night, I get a violent physical reaction. It takes me hours sometimes to calm down. My wife knows this, and after Meredith left for La Guardia she tried to get me to go to bed. I'm sorry now I didn't take her advice! I decided instead to walk it off, and that's just what I did. I must have walked around half the night."

"Meet anyone you know?"

"I've told you. No."

"What time was it when you got back home?"

"I don't remember. All I know is, it was still dark."

"Was it also still foggy?" the voice from the corner said.

Carroll jumped. "No, it wasn't."

Ellery said, "The fog lifted about two a.m., Mr. Carroll."

"You're sure you can't recall the time even approximately?" Inspector Queen's tone was patience itself. "I mean the time you got home?"

Carroll began to look stubborn. "I just didn't notice."

"Maybe Mrs. Carroll did?"

"My wife was asleep. I didn't wake her."

"Item three," the Inspector remarked. "No alibi. And item four: fingerprints."

"Fingerprints?" Carroll said feebly.

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"John's? Where, Inspector?" Tully West asked in a sharp tone. "You realize they wouldn't mean anything if you found them on the pistol."

"We hardly ever find fingerprints on automatics, Mr. West. No, in Hunt's car."

Through the roaring in his ears John Carroll thought: So that's why they fingerprinted me Monday . . . He blinked as he heard the old amusement in his partner's voice.

"Surely you found other prints in the car besides John's and, I assume, Hunt's?"

The old man looked interested. "Whose, for instance?"

"Well, there must be at least a set traceable to the attendant in the public garage where Hunt parked his car."

"Well?"

"And, of course," West said with a smile, "a few of mine."

"Yours, Mr. West?"

"Certainly. Hunt drove John and me home from the office in the Thunderbird on Thursday night—the night before the murder. So I'm going to have to insist that you fingerprint me, too."

Inspector Queen snapped, "Of course, Mr. West. We'll be glad to oblige," and glanced over at the leather chair.

"I have a naive question for you, Carroll." Ellery was studying the smoke-curl of his cigarette. "Did you kill Meredith Hunt?"

"Hell, no," John Carroll said. "I haven't killed anybody since Leyte."

"I think I'm going to advise you not to say any more, John!" Tully West rose. "Is that all, Inspector?"

"For now. And Mr. Carroll."

"Yes?"

"The usual—you're not to leave town. Understand?"

John Carroll nodded slowly. "I guess I do."

Through the lobby of Police Headquarters, down the worn steps to the sidewalk, neither partner said anything. But when they were in a taxi speeding uptown, Carroll kicked the jump-seat and muttered, "Tully, there's something I've got to know."

"What's that?"

"Do *you* think I murdered Meredith?"

"Not a chance."

"Do you really mean that?"

West's monkish face crinkled. "We Wests haven't stuck our necks out since Greatgrandfather West had his head blown off at Chancellorsville."

Carroll sank back. The older man glanced out the cab window at Fourth Avenue.

"On the other hand, you don't lean your weight on a lily pad when a nice big rock is handy. My knowledge of corporation and tax law—or yours, John—isn't going to do much good if that old coot decides to jump. You may need a topflight criminal lawyer soon. To

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tell the truth, I've been thinking of Sam Rayfield."

"I see. All right, Tully, whatever you say." Carroll studied an inflamed carbuncle on their driver's neck. "Tully, what's the effect of this thing going to be on Helena? And on Breckie, Louanne? My God."

He turned to the other window, lips trembling.

A detective from the 17th Precinct made the arrest that afternoon. He and his partner appeared at the Madison Avenue offices of Hunt, West & Carroll just before five o'clock. Carroll recognized them as the men who had questioned him the previous Saturday afternoon; they were apparently the local detectives "carrying" the case.

Miss Mallowan fainted out of season. Tully West's secretary dragged her away.

"I'd like to call my wife," Carroll said.

"Sure, but make it snappy."

"Listen, sweetheart," Carroll said into the phone. He was amazed at the steadiness of his voice. "I'm being arrested. You're not to come running down to the Tombs, do you hear? I want you to stay home and take care of the kids. Understand, Helena?"

"You listen to me." Helena's voice was as steady as his. "You're to let Tully handle everything. I'll tell the children you've had to go off on business. And I'll see you as soon as they'll let me. Do *you* understand, darling?"

Carroll licked his lips. "Yes."

Tully West came running out as they waited for the elevator. "I'm getting Rayfield on this right away. And I'll keep an eye on Helena and the kids. You all right, John?"

"Oh, wonderful," Carroll said wryly.

West gripped his hand and dashed off.

The hard gray-and-green face of the Criminal Courts Building, the night in the cell, the march across the bridge from the prison wing the next morning, his arraignment in one of the chill two-story courtrooms, Helena's strained face as she labored up to kiss him, Tully West's droopy look, the soft impressive voice of Samuel Rayfield, the trap of the judge's gray mouth as he fixed bail at fifty thousand dollars . . . to John Carroll, all of it jumbled into an indigestible mass. He was relieved to find himself back in the cell, and he dozed off at once.

Friday morning the pain caught up with him. Everything hurt sharply. When he was taken into the office of the court clerk, he could not bear to look at the two lawyers, or at his wife. He felt as if his clothing had been taken away.

He heard only dimly the colloquy with the clerk. It had some-

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thing to do with the bail . . . Suddenly Carroll realized that it was his wife who was putting up the bail bond, paying the ransom for his freedom out of the Vanowen money.

"Helena, no!"

But he voiced the cry only in his head. The next thing he knew they were marching out of the court clerk's office.

"Am I free?" Carroll asked foolishly.

"You're free, darling," Helena whispered.

"But fifty thousand dollars," he muttered. "Your money . . ."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, John," West said. "The bail is returnable on the first day of the trial, when you resubmit to the custody of the court. You know that."

"John, dear, it's only money."

"Helena, I didn't do it . . ."

"I know, darling."

Rayfield interposed his genial bulk between them and the lurking photographers and reporters. Somehow, he got them through the barrage of flashbulbs.

As the elevator doors closed, Carroll suddenly noticed a tall man lounging in the corridor, a youngish man with bright eyes. A shock of recognition, rather unpleasant, ran through him. It was that Inspector's son, Ellery Queen. What was he doing here?

The question needled him all the way home.

Then he was safe behind the grayfront on Fifth Avenue. In the Tombs, Carroll had coddled the thought of that safety, wrapping himself in it against the cold steel and antiseptic smell. But they were still with him. When Mrs. Poole took the children tactfully off to the Park, Carroll shivered and gave himself up to the martini that West handed him.

"What was it Meredith used to say about your martinis, Tully? Something about having to be a fifth-generation American to know how to mix one properly?"

"Meredith was a middle-class snob." West raised his glass. "Here's to him. May he never know what hit him."

They sipped in silence.

Then Helena set her glass down. "Tully. Just what does Mr. Rayfield think?"

"The trial won't come up until October."

"That's not what I asked."

"Translation," Carroll murmured. "What are defendant's chances?"

"Rayfield hasn't said." West downed the rest of his drink in a gulp, something he never did.

Helena's silky brows drew the slightest bit toward each other. She said suddenly, "John, you have some enemy you don't know about. Someone who hates you enough to commit murder with your gun. Who is it? Think, darling!"

Carroll shook his head.

"I don't believe it's that at all,

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Helena," West said, pouring a refill. "Taking John's pistol might have been an act of sheer opportunism. Whoever it was might have lifted mine if I'd left it around. Seems to me the question properly is, Who had it in for Meredith?"

Carroll said, "Ask the police. Ask that lip-smacking little Assistant District Attorney."

They were all quiet again.

"But it's true," John Carroll mumbled at last. "It's true I've got to do something . . ."

Tully West's eyes met Helena Carroll's briefly.

"Here, John. Have another martini."

Carroll spent the weekend in seclusion. The telephone kept ringing, but Helena refused to let him be disturbed.

By Sunday night he had made up his mind. Helena heard him typing away on the portable, but when she tried to go in to him, she found the bedroom door locked.

"John! Are you all right?"

"I'll be out in a minute."

When he unlocked the door he was tucking an envelope into his inside breast pocket. He looked calmer, as if he had won a battle.

He helped her over to the chaise. "There's something I've never told anyone, Helena, not even you. I gave my word not to."

"What are you talking about, darling?"

"I've had a big decision to make. Helena, I'm going to come out of this all right. All I ask you to do is stop worrying and trust me. No matter what happens, will you trust me?"

"Oh, John!"

He stooped to kiss her. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

He walked over to Madison Avenue and went into a deserted delicatessen store. In the telephone booth he dialed Meredith Hunt's number.

"Serafina? Mr. Carroll. Let me talk to Mrs. Hunt."

Felicia Hunt's accent vibrated in his ear without its usual charm. "John, are you mad? Suppose they have my telephone tapped? You know what Meredith wrote to them!"

"I also know he got it all crosseyed," Carroll said. "Felicia, I want to see you. Tomorrow I'm going into the office to start helping Tully salvage something from the wreckage, but on my way home I'm stopping in at your place with somebody about six-thirty. Will you be there?"

She sounded exasperated. "I can't go anywhere so soon after the funeral, you know that. Whom are you bringing?"

"No one you know."

"John, I wish you wouldn't—"

He hung up.

When the maid with the Indian face opened the door Carroll said,

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"After you, Gunder," and the man with him stepped nervously into the Hunt house. He was a chubby citizen with a wet pink scalp and rimless eyeglasses. He carried a small leather case.

"The Senora waits upstairs," Serafina said sullenly.

"Get Mr. Gunder a magazine or something," Carroll said. "This won't take long, Gunder."

The man seated himself on the edge of a foyer chair. Carroll hurried up the stairs, taking his brief case with him.

Patricia Hunt was all in black. Even her stockings were black. She gave Carroll a turn; it was rather like walking in on a character drawn by Charles Addams. She wore no make-up and, for the first time since Carroll had known her, no jewelry, not even her pendant. The brilliant fingernails she usually affected were now colorless. Her fingers kept exploring her bosom petulantly.

"Meaning no disrespect to an old Spanish custom," Carroll said, "is this mourning-in-depth absolutely necessary, Felicia? You look like a ghost."

"Thank you," Felicia said spitefully. "Always the *caballero*. Where I come from, John, you do certain things in certain ways. Not that I would dare show my face in the street! Reporters . . . may they all *rot*. What do you want?"

Carroll set his brief case down by the escritoire, went to the door, and carefully closed it. She watched him with sudden interest. He glanced about, nodded at the drawn drapes.

"How mysterious," the widow said in a new tone. "Are you going to kill me or kiss me?"

Carroll laughed. "You're a nourishing dish, Felicia, but if I didn't have an appetite for you a year ago I'd hardly be likely to drool now."

She flung herself on the divan. "Go away," she said sulkily. "I loathe you."

"Why? Because it took you too long to realize what it would mean to Senor the Ambassador, your father, if your passes at me ever got into the newspapers? You didn't loathe me when you were throwing yourself at me all over town, waylaying me in restaurants, making Meredith suspect I was fouling his nest. Have you forgotten those steaming *billets-doux* you kept sending me, Felicia?"

"And you protected me by saying nothing about them. Very noble, John. Now get out."

"Yes, I protected you," Carroll said slowly, "but it begins to look as if I can't protect you any longer. I've told everyone—the police, the D.A., Helena, Tully, Rayfield—that I walked the streets in the rain most of the night that Meredith was shot. As far as they're concerned, right now I have no alibi for the two-hour stretch between two and four a.m., when they say he was murdered."

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She was beginning to look apprehensive.

"But now I'm afraid I'm going to have to tell them that between one o'clock and four-thirty that morning you and I were alone in this room, Felicia. That the fact is, I've had an alibi all along—you—and I kept my mouth shut about it because of how it would look if the story came out."

She said hoarsely, "You wouldn't."

"Not if I can help it." Carroll shrugged. "For one thing, I'm quite aware that nobody, not even Helena, would believe I spent three and a half hours alone with you that night just trying to get you to talk Meredith out of ruining my life. Especially if it also came out, as might very well happen, how you'd run after me, written me those uninhibited love letters."

Her white skin turned ghastly.

"They'd jump to the worst possible conclusion about that night. I don't want that any more than you do, Felicia, although for a different reason. A woman in Helena's physical condition never feels very secure about her husband, no matter how faithful he is to her. A yarn like this . . ." Carroll set his jaw. "I love Helena, but I may have no choice. I'm no storybook hero, Felicia. I'm facing the possibility of the electric chair. That alibi is my life insurance policy. I wouldn't be any good to Helena and the children dead."

"Crucified," Felicia Hunt said bitterly. "I'd be crucified! I won't do it."

"You've got to."

"I won't! You can't make me!"

"If I have to, I will."

Murder glittered from her black eyes. But Carroll did not flinch, and after a moment the glitter flickered and she turned away.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I've typed out a statement. At the moment, all you have to do is sign it. I've brought a man with me to notarize your signature; he's downstairs. He has no idea what kind of document it is. I'll lock it in my safe at the office. Don't look at me that way, Felicia. I've got to protect myself now. You ought to be able to understand that."

She said venomously, "Go call your damned notary," and jumped off the divan.

"You'd better read the statement first."

Carroll took a long manila envelope from his brief case. It was unsealed, bound with a red rubber band. He removed the rubber band, opened the envelope, and took from it a folded sheet of typewriter paper. He unfolded it and handed it to her.

She read it carefully, twice. Then she laughed and handed it back.

"Pig."

Carroll went to the door, paper in hand, and opened it. "Mr. Gunder? Would you come up now, please?"

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The notary appeared, mopping his pink scalp. In the other hand he clutched the leather case. He sneaked a glance at Felicia's figure and immediately looked away.

"This is Mrs. Felicia de los Santos Hunt, widow of the late Meredith Hunt," Carroll said. "Do you need proof of her identity?"

"I've seen Mrs. Hunt's picture in the papers." Gunder had a pink sort of voice, too. He opened his case and spread out on the escritoire an ink pad, several rubber stamps, and a notary's seal. From his breast pocket he produced a fountain pen as big as a cigar. "Now," he said. "We're all set."

Carroll laid the statement, folded except for the bottom section, on the escritoire. He kept his hand on the fold. Felicia snatched the pen from the notary and signed her name in a vicious scrawl.

When the notary was finished, Carroll slipped the paper into the manila envelope, put the red rubber band around it, and stowed the envelope in his brief case. He rezipped the case.

"I'll see you out, Gunder."

They passed Serafina on the stairs; she was wiping the banister with a damp cloth and did not look around.

In the foyer Carroll gave the little man a ten dollar bill, relocked the street door behind him, and returned upstairs. Serafina would not give an inch; he had to walk around her.

Her mistress was lying on the divan, also turned away from him. Goya's Duchess, Carroll thought, rear view. He could hear the Indian maid slamming things around in the bathroom.

"Thanks, Felicia. You've saved my life."

She did not reply.

"I promise I won't use the statement except as a last resort."

When she continued to ignore him, Carroll picked up his brief case and left.

Carroll surrendered himself to the Court on the morning of the second Monday in October. In the battlefield of the photographers' flashbulbs, through the crowded corridor, in the courtroom, the only thing he could think of was where the summer had gone. July, August, September seemed never to have existed. Certainly they did not occupy the same space-time as the nightmare he was walking into.

The nightmare shuttled fast, a disconnected sequence of pictures like random frames from a film. The group face of the panel, one compound jury eye and mouth, the shuffling of shoes, mysterious palavers before the bench of the black-robed man suspended in midair—opening statements, questions, answers, gavels, objections . . . Suddenly it was Wednesday evening and Carroll was back in his cell.

He felt a childish impulse to

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laugh aloud, but he choked it off.

He must have dozed, for the next thing he knew Tully West was peering down at him as from a great height, and behind him peered a familiar figure. Carroll could not remember the cell door's opening or closing.

He sat up quickly.

"John, you remember Ellery Queen."

Carroll nodded. "You gents are doing quite a job on me, Queen."

"Not me," Ellery said. "I'm strictly ground observer corps."

"Then what do you want?"

"Satisfaction," Ellery said. "I'm not getting it."

Carroll glanced at his partner. "What's this, Tully?"

"Queen came to me after the session today and expressed interest in your case." West managed a smile. "It struck me, John, this might be a nice time to encourage him."

Carroll rested his head against the cell wall. For days, part of his mind had been projecting itself into the execution chamber at Sing Sing, and another part had counterattacked with thoughts of Helena and Breckie and Louanne. He took Helena and the children to sleep with him for sheer self-preservation.

"What is it you're not satisfied about?"

"That you shot Hunt."

"Thanks," Carroll laughed. "Too bad you're not on the jury."

"Yes," Ellery said. "But then I don't have the respectful jury mind. I'm not saying you didn't shoot Hunt; I'm just not convinced. Something about this case has bothered me from the start. Something about you, in fact. I wish you'd clear it up, if not for my sake then for yours. It's later than you apparently think."

Carroll said very carefully, "How bad is it?"

"As bad as it can be."

"I've told Queen the whole story, John." West's urbanity was gone; he even did a little semaphore work with his long arms. "And I may as well tell you that Rayfield holds out damned little hope. He says today's testimony of the night man at the office building was very damaging."

"How could it be?" Carroll cried. "He admitted himself he couldn't positively identify as me whoever it was he let into the building that night. It wasn't me, Tully. It was somebody who deliberately tried to look like me—coat and hat like mine, my stumpy walk from that leg wound on Leyte, easily imitated things like that. And then the guy lets himself into our office and swipes my gun. I should think even a child would see I'm being had!"

"Where would a stranger get a key to your office?" Ellery asked.

"How do I know? How do I know he was even a stranger?"

After a while Carroll became

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conscious of the silence. He looked up angrily.

"You don't believe me. Actually, neither of you believes me."

West said, "It's not that, John," and began to pace off the cell.

"Look," Ellery said. "West tells me you've hinted at certain important information that for some unimaginable reason you've been holding back. If it can do anything to clear you, Carroll, I'd advise you to toss it into the pot right now."

A prisoner shouted somewhere. West stopped in his tracks. Carroll put his head between his hands.

"I did something that Friday night that can clear me, yes."

"What!" West cried.

"But it's open to all sorts of misinterpretation, chiefly nasty."

"Nastier than the execution chamber at Sing Sing?"

West said, "A woman," with a remote distaste.

"That's right, Tully." Carroll did not look at Ellery, feeling vaguely offended at his indelicacy. "And I promised her I wouldn't use this except as a last resort. It wasn't for her sake, God knows. I've kept my mouth shut because of Helena. Helena loves me, but she's a woman, and a sick woman at that. If she shouldn't believe me . . ."

"Let me get this straight," Ellery said. "You were with this other woman during the murder period? You can actually prove an alibi?"

"Yes."

"And he keeps quiet about it!" West dropped to the steel bunk beside his friend. "John, how many kinds of idiot are you? Don't you have any faith in Helena at all? What happened? Who's the woman?"

"Felicia."

West said, "Oh."

"Mrs. Hunt?" Ellery said sharply.

"That's right. I wandered around in the rain that night trying to figure out how I was going to stop Meredith from disclosing that twenty thousand dollar lunacy and having me arrested. That's when I thought of Felicia. She'd always been able to get anything out of Meredith that she wanted. I phoned her from a pay station and asked if I couldn't come right over." Carroll muttered, "I was pretty panicky, I guess . . ." His voice petered out.

"Well, well?" West said impatiently.

"She was still up, reading in bed. When I told her what it was about, she said to come over. She let me in herself. The maid was asleep, I suppose—anyway, I didn't see Serafina."

"And the time?" Ellery demanded.

"It was just about one a.m. when I got there. I left at four-thirty." Carroll laughed. "Now you know why I've kept quiet about this. Can I expect my wife to believe that I spent three and a half hours in the

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middle of the night alone with Felicia in her bedroom—and she in a sheer nightgown and peekaboo negligee, by God!—just talking? And not getting anywhere, I might add."

"Three and a half hours?" Ellery's brows went up.

"Felicia didn't see any reason why she should save my neck. Charming character." Carroll's shoulders sloped. "Well, I told you what it would sound like. I'm sure I'd doubt the story myself."

"How much of the time did you have to fight for your honor?" West murmured. "If I didn't know John so well, Queen, I'd be skeptical, too. Felicia's had a mad thing for him. But he's always been allergic to her. I suppose, John, she was willing to make a deal?"

"Something like that."

"One night of amour in return for her influence on dear Meredith in your behalf. Yes, that would be Felicia's little libido at work. But Helena . . ." West frowned. "Quite a situation at that."

Ellery said, "It will have to be risked. Carroll, will Mrs. Hunt support your alibi in court?"

"She'd find it pretty tough to deny her own signature. I had her sign a full statement before a notary."

"Good. Where is the statement?"

"In my safe at the office. It's in a plain manila envelope marked 'Confidential' and bound around with a red rubber band."

"I suggest you give West permission to open your safe, and I'd like to go along as security. Right now."

Carroll bit his lip. Then, abruptly, he nodded.

"Do you know the combination, West?"

"Unless John's changed it. It's one of those letter-combination safes in which you can make the combination any word you want. John, is the combination word still 'Helena'?"

"No. I've changed the damn thing four times this summer. The word now is 'rescue'."

"And that," West said solemnly, "is sheer poetry. Well, John, if the open-sesame that Queen lugs around in his wallet should work again in this Bastille, we'll be back with you shortly."

They were as good as West's word. Less than ninety minutes later the guard admitted them once more to Carroll's cell. Ellery had the manila envelope in his hand. He tossed the envelope to the bunk.

"All right, Carroll, let's hear it."

"You haven't opened it?"

"I'd rather you did that yourself."

Carroll picked up the envelope. He slipped the red rubber band off and around his wrist and, with an effort, inserted his fingers into the envelope.

West said, "John. What's the matter?"

"Is this a gag?" Carroll was frantic. His fingers kept clawing around inside the envelope.

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"Gag?"

"It's empty! The statement's not here!"

Ellery took the envelope from Carroll's shaking hand, squeezed it open, and peered inside. "When did you see the contents last?"

"I opened the safe several times this summer to make sure the envelope was still there, but I never thought to examine it. I just took it for granted . . ." Carroll sprang from the bunk. "Nobody could have got into that safe—nobody! Not even my secretary. Nobody knew the combination words!"

"John, John." West was shaking him.

"But how in God's name . . . Unless the safe was broken into! Was it broken into, Queen?"

"No sign of it."

"Then I don't understand!"

"One thing at a time." Ellery took Carroll's other arm and they got him back on the bunk. "The loss isn't necessarily fatal. All you have to do is make sure Mrs. Hunt takes the stand and repeats her statement under oath. She'd have been called to testify, anyway, once the written statement had been placed in evidence. Isn't that right, West?"

"Yes. I'll get hold of Felicia right off."

Carroll was gnawing his fingernails. "Maybe she won't agree, Tully. Maybe . . ."

"She'll agree." West was grim. "Queen, would you come with me? This is one interview I prefer an unbiased witness for. Keep your shirt on, John."

They were back in Carroll's cell with the first grays of dawn. Carroll, who had dropped off to sleep, sat up stupidly. Then he jerked wide-awake. His partner's monkish flesh had acquired a flabbiness he had never seen before.

Carroll's glance darted to the tall shadow in the corner of the cell.

"What's wrong now?" Carroll chattered. "What's happened?"

"I'm afraid . . . the absolute worst." Ellery's voice was full of trouble. "The Hunt house is closed down, Carroll. I'm sorry. Felicia Hunt seems to have disappeared."

(continued on page 90)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **NORMAN DANIELS**

TITLE: ***Chink in the Armor***

TYPE: Cop Story

DETECTIVE: Sergeant Ross

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Ross was the precinct's expert on making reluctant witnesses talk, and teenage Ollie was Mr. Close Mouth himself. It was a battle of technique, patience—and understanding of the human heart . . .*

"SIT THERE." SERGEANT HANK ROSS pointed to the chair on the opposite side of the table. "Take off your coat if you want to."

The boy was eighteen, but to Hank Ross he was just a kid. Overgrown, with six feet of lanky frame, cropped hair, and a big nose that once caused him to be called Beaky. His eyes were watery and weak and his vision improved by the use of thick glasses in a heavy, black plastic frame. He was one of the most unlikely-looking persons imaginable for the title of chronic criminal, but that's what his record said —and proved.

His name was Ollie Bonaventure, another handicap in a rough, big-city neighborhood where the kids pounced on a name like that and exploited it for their own amusement and their victim's constant embarrassment.

Hank Ross sat down on the hard, straight-backed chair. This was a job he didn't relish, but he was the precinct's expert on making reluctant witnesses talk. He knew their rights, he respected them, and in this tough neighborhood his subjects knew their rights too.

"Let me give it to you in the fewest words possible," Ross began. "This morning a big car was found parked near the Armitage Avenue dump. Behind the wheel was Big Joe Maxey, a well-known gangster,

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with a bullet through his head. Beside him was Gina Leslie, a curvy lady of about forty. She'd been shot through the back of the neck. Nobody was surprised that all this happened. Big Joe had it coming for thirty-odd years. Gina just happened to be there. The car was wiped clean of prints—not even Big Joe's were found. There was one exception—one big, fat, oily, clear-as-a-bell print on the handle of the back door. It was from your right thumb, Ollie. What do you have to say?"

"You can hold me forty-eight hours without a formal charge." Ollie blinked behind his glasses. "Then you have to send me into court or let me go. I can sit here for forty-eight hours and take anything you dish out."

"I believe you," Ross agreed.

"Last year they had me at the 32nd Precinct and they grilled me for two days. I didn't say anything—not a word. Two months later I was back, and I sat there and took it again. Six months ago *you* had me in here—in this same room—and I didn't open my yap. I won't this time either."

"Okay," Ross said. "I know your tactics. You take so much questioning and then you stop talking altogether. Before that happens, fill me in a little, will you?—just to satisfy my curiosity. You're no punk. You never were one of those jerks who ran around with gangs. You had a couple of years of high school. If things didn't go your way, maybe it wasn't your fault entirely."

"What are you getting at, Sergeant?" Ollie asked in a friendly voice.

"Why this chip on your shoulder? Why the idea you can spend your life scrounging around, picking up a buck here or there without any physical effort on your part? What gives you the idea you're different from anyone else? You owe society something. You're not all alone in the world, you know.

"Depends on what you call being alone."

Ross was not at all certain he understood the boy's viewpoint. Besides, he wasn't getting anywhere, and as the precinct's prize interrogator he was expected to come up with at least something.

"Okay," he said, "let's try it for size. We don't think you knocked off Big Joe and his lady love. We don't think you were with the guys who did. But we do think you were sleeping in the abandoned watchman's shanty at the edge of the dump and that you saw Big Joe drive the car there, likely with a gun at the back of his head. We think you heard the shots, saw somebody get out of Big Joe's car, and wipe it clean—saw somebody go over to where another car was parked, get in, and drive away. We think you waited a while, went to Big Joe's car, and opened the back door. You knew there'd be some-

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body dead in there, but when you saw Big Joe and recognized him, you didn't want any part of that waltz, so you faded. How'm I doing, kid?"

"I seen better stories on TV," Ollie grinned.

"I don't doubt it. So now I have to ask the big question. Who'd you see step out of that car?"

"So long, Sergeant," Ollie said. "I just became deaf and mute. I just turned into a hunk of meat. I don't hear anything more you say and this is my last word."

He settled back and clamped his jaws shut until the muscles stood out.

Ross sighed. "You're the one witness we've got. Big Joe probably gave us as much trouble as any punk with his rep, and I'm not going to be dewy-eyed and say we're sorry he's dead. But a funny thing happens when there's a murder, kid. The victim could have been the biggest skunk in creation, but once he starts chilling off, he's just a dead man and we've got to find out who killed him if we can. Here, have a cigarette."

Ross took one himself, then scaled the pack across the desk. Ollie made no move to pick it up. His expression gave no hint that he even heard the invitation. Ross knew he was licked, but he couldn't give up. The case was important enough to keep trying, even though there was virtually no chance of success.

Ollie had learned his lesson well. Four years ago they'd sent him to a reformatory after he had confessed to a series of petty thefts at the public school he attended. Without his confession they'd never have had enough to bring him before a juvenile court and the cop who made the pinch was foolish enough to say so. Ollie had never forgotten. To him, silence was a golden way to freedom.

Now he merely closed his ears to the sound of the human voice, refused to ask for anything, even a drink of water. Undoubtedly he'd fortified himself with a long drink before he was brought into the room.

With most suspects an interminable grilling usually produced results. They answered easy questions stumbled over the serious ones, went back again and again, and each time added another small mistake or tiny change in their stories until the true picture emerged. It was always slowly and painstakingly drawn from the mind of the suspect, via his reluctantly wagging tongue.

Ollie, however, was different. Ollie said nothing and no amount of verbal persuasion could even make him groan. He merely sat there, a living tissue with the impressionable vulnerability of a vegetable. Ross hoped not many others would ever think of Ollie's simple idea. If you say nothing—nothing at all—you can't be tripped up.

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He kept at it for an hour. "Nobody suspects you of killing Big Joe and his girl friend—nobody! We're not saying you stole anything off their bodies. Small-time punk that you are, you never turned *that* low. And there isn't a soul knows we have you here. The people who knocked off Big Joe haven't the faintest idea they were seen, and you have my word they won't know until it's too late for them to do anything to you. So how about it, Ollie?"

Ollie said nothing, eloquently.

"There's no sense my saying it's your civic duty to tell us what you know, because you don't recognize civic laws or customs. It's just as senseless for me to say it's your moral duty because morals you haven't got and never heard of—at least not enough to feed a hummingbird. As for bringing in religion—hah! You never even heard of religion."

Ollie's jaw muscles seemed to grow a trifle larger, but that was the only sign he gave.

"All right." Ross stood up. "We'll hold you the limit of legal time and then turn you loose. Another double murder will go down on our books as unsolved because a small-time punk won't give *us* a break. That's what you are, Ollie—a small time hoodlum. There's only one thing in your favor. You won't suffer any pangs of conscience—because you haven't got a conscience, boy. You got just one great big emptiness in your heart—and in your head. Get out of here, punk."

Ollie didn't move and Ross knew his hunch about him was right. Ollie did steel himself against hearing anything said. He'd discovered a way to shut out all sounds—possibly by thinking of something else so intently that there wasn't room in his mind for extraneous subjects.

Ross had to finally shake him to bring Ollie out of it. Then Ollie gave a genuine smile, frosted with triumph.

Ross turned him over to a patrolman for locking up.

It was too late in the afternoon to do much more than make an oral report to the detective captain. His name was Morgan, a slim, well-tailored individual who hated to read written reports and thought a man should face up to his superiors, especially in reporting a failure.

"Well," Morgan conceded, "if you can't make that kid talk, nobody can. Shall we turn him loose?"

"Not yet. Give me a chance to think of something—some new angle."

"If he had a lawyer he'd be out by now," Morgan said. "Okay, do your best. We picked up some beautiful tire-tread patterns from the dump area where the getaway car was parked. Peculiar markings on those tires, and if we find the rubber that made 'em, we'll soon have the guys who killed Big Joe."

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"I'll keep at it," Ross promised.

But a man can't work around the clock, especially when he has a lovely and loving wife waiting for him in a pleasant apartment uptown. Laura greeted him with her customary smack—it was more than just a kiss. It was a heartfelt application of the lips that said, "I'm glad you're with me again." She had a lot of time on her hands and spent much of it cooking wonderful dishes that were gradually taking the count of the holes in Ross's belt.

As usual, he told her about his day's work. Unless he was involved in something potentially dangerous, he gave her a full rundown. "He's a funny kid, this Ollie Bonaventure. He's not just smart, as young hoodlums are smart. It's a sort of native intelligence. He sits there and says nothing. He doesn't even listen. I'm considered a specialist in making people talk, but my rating is going out the window with Ollie. Red-hot irons wouldn't make him give me even the time of day."

"Is he a bad kid?" Laura asked. "I mean, is he vicious, cruel?"

"He's bad, but he's neither vicious nor cruel. Why?"

"Because his attitude of go-to-the-devil may be some sort of protection he developed long ago. What's his background?"

"Busted home—mother ran off. His father's a lush—works but spends it all on booze. No brothers or sisters—nobody, I guess. Had two years of high school, then finished his education in a reformatory where they specialize in learning elementary mugging instead of Latin."

She put another slice of the sweet-and-sour pot roast on his plate, thus weakening his resolute nature a trifle. "No one, especially so young, can encase himself in a suit of armor that hasn't got a chink somewhere."

"I wonder," Ross said slowly, and ate the meat like a hungry man instead of one who was already overstuffed. "I hate letting a kid like Ollie get the best of me—bad for morale. Besides, if we did nab the people who murdered Big Joe and the girl, it would look nice on my departmental record when they read it next year for lieutenancy."

Laura spoke firmly. "I have an exciting mystery book to finish and I think there are one or two good shows on TV—the kind *you* call sudsy, but the women wear beautiful gowns even if the plots don't. So I'd be grateful if you got going—I know you want to follow up this Ollie business."

He insisted on doing the dishes, but all through them he was thinking of angles. When he left the apartment, he had a definite idea of his route.

Ollie's father had two rooms on the second floor of a Third Avenue flat. The place smelled of stale beer and dill pickles, an odd combination outside of a cheap barroom;

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but Ross's nose was correct because the corner of the room—the so-called kitchenette—had a table littered with empty beer cans and cartons from a delicatessen.

Oliver Bonaventure, Senior, was a smaller man than his son by four or five inches—a sloppy, surly man.

"How do *I* know what's the matter with the kid? He's been in trouble ever since he was old enough to swipe apples off'n a fruit stand. His mother never could do anything with him. He drove her so nuts, I think that's why she ran off."

Ross thought no woman would require more of a reason than the man who sat at the table and drank beer out of a can.

"He's not in any trouble himself—not this time. You see, he was staying in some shack and this car—"

"He's got a car? Listen, that kid's got a car, it's mine! He's a minor. Put the lousy brat in jail where he belongs, but you don't confiscate that car. No, sir, I been wantin' a car—"

"He doesn't own a car. This was someone else's," Ross said patiently.

"Oh! Whyn't you say so? Look, I brought that kid up. He never did anything for me—not one damned thing. Fars I'm concerned, throw away the key. He's no good—he was born no good."

Ross left the man licking at the foam spreading over the top of his fourth can of beer. He stopped off next on West 63rd Street. The mail box bore the card of Miss Bessie Little and the Miss somehow seemed underscored. Ross saw why when she let him into her three-room meticulously clean apartment.

"A police officer?" she asked. She was a severe-looking woman with salt-and-pepper hair pulled back tight. "About Oliver Bonaventure? Well, really now, Oliver hasn't been my pupil since freshman high. I haven't seen him in years."

"But you've heard of him," Ross said. "His probation records show you were interviewed when he was in trouble before. This time he's not in trouble and he might be able to render a very definite service to the community—if we could only make him understand that."

"I doubt that you will. Oliver never did have any sense of responsibility. His grades were consistently poor, his deportment was atrocious, and his attendance made a record that I think still stands—for non-attendance, I mean. In short, he was a boy you could predict would go wrong."

"Did you ever try to help him?" Ross asked bluntly.

"Why, certainly I did! And I don't like your tone, officer! I try to help *all* my pupils, especially those who have a tendency toward delinquency. I permitted Oliver to go on class outings, for which a certain fee was necessary to defray expenses. He never had the fee, but I arranged for him to work his way, carrying field equipment if it

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was that sort of trip. He once carried our baggage on a trip to Washington, and then vanished without taking the tour. He got home somehow. After *that,* I didn't invite him again."

"Well, I can't say I've found him very cooperative either, Miss Little."

"He was an ungrateful wretch, officer—quite unappreciative of anything I ever did for him."

Ross nodded slowly, but he felt he couldn't give up quite yet. "Among his fellow students, was there anyone he seemed to like a little more than the rest? Somone who could be able to tell me a few details that you, as a teacher, might have missed."

"He had few friends, Sergeant. Usually he was alone and he seemed to like it that way. No, I'd say there was no one in particular . . ." She squinted slightly, as if looking back were difficult. "Wait . . . there was a girl. Yes . . . yes, her name was Vivian Argent. Unusual last name. A shy creature—like Oliver in some respects, though she never violated any of the rules or regulations. Oliver used to trail after her—you know how they are at that age."

"Argent," Ross said. "That is an unusual name. Maybe I can locate her."

He did, after first locating her mother and learning the address and married name of Vivian. She had married a subway conductor named Baylor and she lived on the West Side in a large apartment house owned by an insurance company. The house was built where a slum area used to be.

Vivian was still plain and scary enough to be highly suspicious of Ross and keep the chain on the door until she had first studied his badge intently. They couldn't have come much plainer in high school, and if Vivian had clung to Ollie for company even if he had been a juvenile horror, Ross could easily see why.

"Oh, he's in trouble again," she said. "Every time I go back to the old neighborhood I hear that Ollie's done something else. But I haven't seen him in—why, it's five years now. How do you expect me to help you?"

"Just fill me in a little on the kind of boy he was. I want to understand him better."

"Well, that's easy. He was two individuals, really. He could be so nice. Mostly he was that way when I first knew him, but when he began taking me out—you know, the movies, mostly—he changed. And all I did was try and help him. I made him sit in a loge at the movies, even if it cost more, because I didn't think a boy should bring a girl to the theatre unless he could afford for the best seats. And the dances he used to take me to—free for nothing. Imagine! Once there was just a piano player and somebody with a drum. I changed that too—I made him take me to Birdland

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and Danceland and Coney Island—you know, places like that. It didn't do any good though—he went bad anyway."

Ross excused himself as quickly and gracefully as he could and took a bus home. He sat down in the living-room with a weak highball and told Laura all about it.

"Just like most of them—he never had a chance. Struck out right after he was born. Mother ran off, father interested only in what the kid could bring home in the way of money—or maybe loot. A teacher who meant well but who made him work for the other students if he wanted to go on field trips. Imagine that! And she honestly believed she was doing him a favor. Carrying baggage for the other kids. How'd Ollie feel back at school when the trip was over? How would you feel? Even the mousy kid he had a boyish crush on—she tried to improve him by insisting he spend more money on her than he could afford. Might even be the reason why he began to steal."

Laura nodded slowly, thinking about it. "True—even bankers sometimes steal for the same reason. Hank, is he *really* a bad kid?"

"Yes. What else can I say? He's in so deep now he's bad."

"What will you do with him?"

"Let him go. What else? He's guilty of nothing except withholding information and we're not even positive of that. And there goes my otherwise perfect record. Big Chief of the Grill Room—that's what they've been calling me. The guy who can make anybody talk. The human lie detector. Last month I made an absconding bank teller show me where he'd hidden the money he swiped. He was going to take the rap and then enjoy the cash after he got out. He'd planned it for three years and I broke him down in twenty minutes flat just by using a little simple logic on him. And I once made a wife-killer reenact the crime when we didn't have any more to go on than a vague hunch he might be guilty. Dozens of other cases—every one broken down. And now I meet a kid who shuts me out, won't talk, won't help. He's not even guilty of anything—but I can't get him to open up."

"When you release him, Hank, please bring him home to dinner," Laura suggested. "I'd like to meet the boy."

Ross laughed. "You'd be sorry ten minutes after he got here, and you might be yelling cop after he leaves with half our silverware."

"I'll take the chance," she said.

"Now listen—being sorry for the kid's okay, but adopting him . . . Laura, he isn't the type."

"Just bring him home for dinner. I don't want to adopt him, Hank. I just want to see and talk to a boy who can break the record of the Big Chief of the Grill Room. What a title!"

So Ollie went home with Ross

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the next evening. He went suspiciously and contemptuously, but he ate as if he hadn't eaten in a month. Laura had guessed he'd have that big an appetite and had prepared for it. Ross could stow away a pretty good meal himself, but the kid was the equal of four big men.

"Y'know somethin'," Ollie said, when he finally found a spare moment for his vocal cords. "That was the best food I ever ate in my whole life. I guess I got you to thank for that, Mrs. Ross." He looked straight across the table at Ross. "But you, Sergeant, you ain't gettin' no place with this kind of treatment. I been soft-soaped before. Maybe not by experts like you, but I know all the angles."

Hank grinned at him. "If you said anything less, I'd have lost my respect for you, kid. I'm not asking any questions—I know better."

Laura refused help with the dishes, so Ross and Ollie sat around for a while until Ollie showed definite signs of being ill at ease, which Laura was quick to notice.

Ross went down to the street with Ollie. "Now look here, kid, I don't want any wisecracks. I know what you had in your pockets, and you haven't enough dough to rent a room for even one night. So I'm going to lend you a ten-spot. I can't afford it, frankly, but it's no more than right. We gave you a bad time. If you ever earn ten bucks—I said *earn* it—pay me back. Otherwise, forget it."

"I don't want your dough." Ollie instantly reverted. "I take it and then you begin askin' questions."

"I've finished asking you questions, Ollie. You don't have to take the dough, but I'll be frank with you—my wife told me to make you take it. Personally, I'd rather give you a kick in the pants because you've given me such a headache, but then I guess I don't really blame you. Take the sawbuck—and no strings attached. Okay?"

Ollie nodded. "If Mrs. Ross says so." He managed a grin. It was the first happy grin Ross had ever seen across the boy's face. "I wouldn't want you to get in another jam. Thanks. So long, Sergeant. See you in jail."

"Likely," Ross said. "Very likely indeed."

He went home, took off his coat, mixed himself his usual weak highball, and sat down beside Laura.

"Okay," he said. "He took it—reluctantly, I'll admit. So what do we do now?"

"We wait," Laura said. "Perhaps forever."

It took two weeks. Ross tried not to show his surprise when Ollie walked into the office late one afternoon and smoothed a ten-dollar bill on the desk.

"I earned it," he said. His eyes behind the big glasses were deadly serious. "That makes us square, Sergeant. I owe you nothin' and you owe me nothin'."

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"We're square," Ross said.

"Okay." Ollie reached for a pen and a pad, wrote down a number very carefully. "So now you can owe *me*. That's the number of the car the two guys used after they gunned Big Joe and the dame. Just don't start asking me no questions."

"Just one," Ross said. "Why?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I ain't any different from what I was before. I'm the same guy. But for the first time in my life somebody did something nice for me without asking anything back. Everybody I ever met always wanted something back —something more than I could give. Your wife, she didn't ask any favors. You let me go and you didn't press me none. I waited two weeks to make sure and you never came near me. So there's your stinkin' car number and you can land on them two stinkin' killers and get yourself off the hook."

"I'm grateful," Ross said.

"You oughta be. Don't ask me any more favors, Sergeant. If I can help it, you won't even see me again. I got a job and I like it. So long, Sarge."

He shook hands very gravely and went out. Ross put the wheels into motion for a quick arrest. Then he telephone Laura and told her.

"I'm glad," she said. "Come home early if you can."

Ross hung up, thinking there wasn't anyone quite like her. And thinking there were an infinite number of ways of being a cop.

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IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

by JUAN PAGE

THE TWO BIG MEN TALKED IN WHISPERS AND SCOWLED MENACINGLY AT little Luis.

"Gotta watch this tricky little buzzard or he'll steal the fillin's outa your teeth," growled the heavy-set one.

"I got my eye on him," said the tall one, nervously wiping his right hand on his uniform. "He won't get away with nothin' from me."

Luis smiled at them innocently. The stocky man turned away, spat, and stomped off angrily. The tall man glared at Luis suspiciously, and Luis stared impudently back. There was a bag he wanted, and he certainly wasn't going to let these two big monkeys keep him from stealing it. He glanced casually at the bag and then watched the tall man again. The big fellow sweated and fidgeted; he knew what Luis was after, but he didn't know what to do about it.

Luis was an accomplished thief. He relied on lightning-quick reflexes, perfect timing, speed of foot, and an uncanny knowledge of how his victim would react. This big clown, for instance, was so worried about Luis that he had forgotten all about Luis's accomplice, the Fox, and it didn't pay to take the Fox too lightly. As soon as the big boy realized that, he was going to go all to pieces, and that would make the job easier for both of them.

Luis and the Fox had worked together for some time, and they worked together beautifully; if you watched Luis, the Fox would get something good, and if you concentrated on the Fox, Luis would steal you blind. As a matter of fact, Luis did most of the stealing, but he knew that he could always depend on the Fox to back him up. It was a pleasant and profitable relationship, especially since they had acquired a new friend, Big Ted, who made frequent contact with the fences.

The tall man made a threatening gesture, and Luis dodged apprehensively back.

Suddenly: "Hey, what about me?" called the Fox tauntingly. "I can't wait around all day."

This was the moment. As always, Luis heard a roaring in his ears and felt as if fifty thousand eyes were watching him. The big man sighed and turned reluctantly to face the Fox . . .

CHALLENGE TO THE READER: *Have you foreseen the last sentence of the story—the "snapper"? If not, please turn to page 63*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THEODORE MATHIESON**

TITLE: ***Dan'l Boone, Detective***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: Boonesborough, Kentucky

TIME: In the year 1777

COMMENTS: *The first American in the series of famous historical figures imagined to have been detectives in their own times—the great trail blazer, pioneer, and backwoodsman.*

ON AN EVENING IN THE EARLY fall of 1777, as Daniel Boone sat by his cabin fireplace mending the trigger guard upon "Tick-Licker," his favorite rifle, an urgent knocking came upon the door.

"Dan'l Boone!"

Not recognizing the voice calling outside, Daniel looked warningly at his wife, Rebecca, who stopped grinding corn between the stone surfaces of an old quern. Jemima, his attractive sixteen-year-old daughter, took a step towards the door. Daniel cried softly: "Stand fast, girl. I will answer it."

It was a Shawnee trick to call out a white man's name from the canebrake and, when the man went to investigate, to cut him down. An Indian might try it even here, within the precincts of the settlement. It had been done twice in Harrodsburg, two days' journey to the west, and Harrodsburg's palisade was completed, whereas Boonesborough was picketed on two sides only.

Daniel seized a loaded rifle from the mantel. Holding it in firing position, he drew aside the wooden latch and flung open the door.

But it was only young Adam Barr, one of Boone's permanent scouts, his fair face beet-red with excitement.

"Dan'l!" he cried. "William Mur-

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phy has just been scalped. They found him by the river, pushed down on a sharp stump so hard it's gone half through him."

"His family?" Boone's wide mouth stretched thin.

"They're all right. Murphy was out alone when it happened. Like the others were."

The young man broke off to smile at Jemima. Boone's daughter managed to scan the youth's hollow-cheeked, handsome face and the long blond hair that fell curling to his shoulders before dropping her gaze with a blush.

"Come, Adam," Boone said, putting on his hat. "Becky, bar the cabin, hear?"

As the two men stepped out into the open, Boone was aware of dogs barking and people running to and fro in the moonlit night. They hurried at once towards the palisade gate, shut now against possible Indian attack.

Just inside the gate, a crowd of settlers stood silently around a stiff figure upon the ground.

"Is no one guarding the south side?" Boone demanded, and he sent three men to stand sentry. Then he knelt heavy-heartedly by the side of the dead Murphy. The mournful cries of Murphy's family faded away as some kindly settler opened his home to them.

"Why bother to guard the opening, Boone?" asked Colonel Callaway, a heavy-set, middle-aged man with a bulldog chin. "You know there are no hostile Indians about. This is the sixth scalping inside the month, and your scouts haven't found one trace of Indian sign."

"Shawnees are experts at covering sign."

"Now you know that's no answer! And poor Murphy here had his gun with him. They all had their guns. *Why didn't they use 'em?*"

Boone rose slowly and looked deep into the vindictive eyes of his one-time friend. Colonel Callaway had turned against him when the Virginia land company that financed the settling of Boonesborough granted Daniel two thousand Kentucky acres and gave Callaway none. Callaway had flown into a rage, avowing that he had risked his life as often as Boone in blazing the trail. The fact that Boone had remonstrated with the Virginia company on Colonel Callaway's behalf had not softened the Colonel's enmity.

"All right, Colonel, why didn't they use their rifles?" Boone asked quietly.

"Haven't you once thought it might be a white Indian?"

A murmur passed through the crowd. They all had good reason to fear the renegade whites who became blood brothers with the Indians.

Boone looked down at the bloody-headed corpse at his feet. "You think this is the work of a white Indian?"

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"You're danged right I do!" Callaway shouted, encouraged by the attentiveness of the others. "It's my bet there's a white renegade living right here in the settlement with us. That way he could step up to Murphy and the other five and put a knife into 'em without their raising a gun to defend theirselves!"

"I don't think a white man would do that," said Simon Kenton, another of Boone's scouts. As he spoke, the lean young scout stepped closer to Boone.

Callaway sneered. "How about the Girty brothers younker? They helped the Cherokees torture more than one white man, didn't they? The British are paying the Indians plenty to drive us out of Kentuck. The way I figger, the Indians can't come in force against us right now, so they've sent a single white renegade to try to terrorize us out."

Boone nodded gravely. "Could be, Colonel. Sounds right reasonable."

"Danged reasonable. So why don't you do something about it, instead of sending men to stand guard?"

Daniel Boone fought to control his temper. Now forty-three, the famous frontiersman stood commandingly tall in his deerskins, but his dark hair, which was plaited and clubbed up behind, showed streaks of gray. In the torchlight his gaunt face, with its high forehead, prow-like nose and flaring lips, looked as if it had been boldly sculptured out of Kentucky limestone.

"I'll tell you why, Colonel," Boone said finally, his tone even. "Although what you say might be true, just think what it would mean in this settlement to believe it. No man here would be able to trust his neighbors. If we can't trust one another, we'd better all start packin' back to Virginia."

Simon Kenton made an impatient sound. "We'd better go out again, Dan'l," he said. "Adam and Flanders and me. This time we won't give up until we've found sign."

Boone glanced at Simon Kenton, and then at Adam Barr, who stood beside Simon. Both had long blond hair; either could be a renegade white. Actually he knew little about them except that they were excellent scouts. As a child either could have lived through an Indian attack upon his family and been adopted into a tribe, since both possessed the kind of hair Indian might spare from the scalping knife.

The frontiersman shook his head; Callaway's suspicions had infected him, too.

"I'll go with you. Tell Flanders. We'll start at dawn."

By the time the crowns of the conifers at the forest edge showed sharply in the gray light, Boone and his scouts were ready. They

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met by the forge in the middle of the settlement, Adam Barr and Simon Kenton in high spirits, but Flanders Callaway, the Colonel's nephew, abstracted and grim. Each man carried a well-oiled rifle, powder horn, and jerked meat, and wore in a loose leather scabbard at his hip a long hunting knife, newly honed.

"Before now," Boone said, "I've spread us out from here to every point of the compass. But this time we'll cross the river and go north for half a day and *then* scatter. I've heard rumors that Blackfish up on the Ohio is gettin' mighty uneasy about us, and I think our scalpers are coming from that direction. What is it, Colonel?"

A small crowd had gathered about them, and Colonel Callaway was stepping boldly forward.

"Daniel Boone, I've decided that I shall not permit Flanders to waste his time by going with you. My nephew has better things to do than hunt for red Injuns that don't exist."

"I'm going with Dan'l, Uncle," young Flanders Callaway said. "You can't stop me."

"But I tell you we have only to look around the settlement and start asking questions, and we'll find the murdering devil soon enough!"

"Colonel, you do no service to our settlement by turnin' men against each other," Boone said. "Hold off—at least until we get back. If we find no trace, we'll investigate as you suggest."

"These men are with me," the Colonel said, indicating the others. "They want an investigation now!"

But we're willin' to wait until Dan'l gits back," said William Coomes, the blacksmith. Seven feet tall in his moccasins and extremely thin, Coomes towered over his neighbors like a sparsely needled giant of the pine woods. There was an approving murmur.

The Colonel shot a deadly look at the blacksmith.

"All right! But if you find nothing, Boone, we're going to take matters into our own hands!"

"Fair enough," Boone said. "All right, boys."

"But Flanders will stay here," Callaway growled.

"Do not try to stop me, Uncle."

Boone folded his arms and waited.

"I'll not lay hands on you," the Colonel said, "but Flanders, if you go now without my permission, you'll have to build your own cabin to live in when you return."

"And that I'm ready to do!" his nephew cried.

"He's old enough, Colonel," Boone drawled. "I built my own lean-to when I was fourteen. Flanders, you can bed down in my woodshed until you get a shelter built."

Colonel Callaway spat with fury at the frontiersman's feet. But he spoke softly enough.

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"You better find Injun tracks, Boone."

Boone smiled and marched towards the gate, the three young scouts at his heels.

They crossed the Kentucky River on a raft, hid the raft in the brush, and struck into the woods along a trace.

"You could hide trail for miles, walkin' on those," Boone said, pointing at a long series of fallen tree trunks paralleling the trace. "Besides, he'd likely be less careful farther along."

The four men made camp at noon on the banks of a thinly running creek. Flanders Callaway stretched out on a pile of pine needles and became confidential.

"I sure hope we can find the scalper, Dan'l," he said. "If we don't, my uncle's going to accuse you of not doin' what's right for the settlers, and he'll send back a bad report to the company. I know him like a moccasin print. Of course, it ain't the truth, but he's got a way of making people believe him."

Boone nodded. The Colonel was a dangerous enemy. Boone did not doubt that other settlers than those who had appeared at the Colonel's side that morning felt more loyalty to Callaway than they did to him. And if these mysterious scalpings continued . . .

"Dan'l don't have to worry about your uncle, Callaway. Adam Barr said suddenly. Boone looked sharply from one to the other. Adam had not addressed a single word to Flanders Calloway since leaving Boonesborough, nor had Flanders so much as glanced at Adam.

"If we don't find anything," Adam went on, "Dan'l can still take care of himself against old Callaway."

Flanders sprang to his feet.

"I don't have to listen to your bleat! Who are you, Adam Barr? Where'd you come from? You could be the white Injun who's scalpin' our party, for all we know!"

Adam stood up slowly, tensing his muscles for combat. Boone stepped between them.

"If you two go on like this, one of you goes back to the settlement," he said sharply.

The two young men backed off, each staring sullenly at the ground.

"All right," the frontiersman said. "Adam, you scout west, Flanders east. Be back here by sundown." Without a word Barr and Callaway picked up their rifles and disappeared in opposite directions.

"I scout south, Dan'l?" Simon Kenton asked.

"Hold up, Simon." Boone laid a hand on the young man's shoulder. "Why in thunder should Adam and Flanders clapperclaw each other?"

Simon looked uncomfortable. He studied the yellowing leaves of

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an ash tree. Boone shook him gently. "Speak up, Simon, or I'll send *you* back to Boonesborough!"

"Dang it, Dan'l." Young Kenton's face was aflame with embarrassment. "Both Adam and Flanders are soft on—on your daughter."

"Jemima?" Daniel Boone asked incredulously. "But she's only a child! She still plays with rag dolls!"

"Not any more, sir. Not for some time. Reckon you ain't noticed."

Boone stood with his mouth open for several seconds, then he began to laugh silently.

"By Yadkin, I guess that's so. A father's always the last to notice!"

As darkness settled down over the forest and the scouts sat around the campfire chewing jerky, Boone passed around his flask of Monongahela—raw whiskey. No recent Indian sign had been found, and the meal was consumed in gloomy silence.

Suddenly, from afar, came the cry of a wolf. Boone felt the lumbar chill which often meant Indians were near. He rose and tried to relieve the chill by stretching. When it did not go away, he pointed to the north and said: "We found nothing. But Shawnees might come from there at any time. I opine we'll give 'em a dead camp tonight."

Adam Barr and Simon Kenton nodded. They began to roll their bedding up into dummy figures. These they would leave by the fire, while they bedded down some distance off.

But Flanders Callaway hesitated.

"We didn't find anything today," he said. "Mightn't that mean—don't get riled with me, Dan'l—that Uncle was right?"

"It's natural for you to think so," Boone said, unperturbed. "It's just that I won't let myself believe it until I can't believe anything else."

"Nor will we," Adam said pointedly.

Without another word, Flanders prepared his dummy. When he was finished, they exchanged good-night nods and repaired to separate places in the brush, a little way off but in sight of the fire. Boone noted the position of each of the young men before he dropped off to sleep.

He awoke suddenly, senses ringing an alarm. He knew beyond question that a fifth man was in camp, for above the thin trickle of the creek he could hear a faint rustling—it came from the black shadows beneath the pines—and smell an odor of rancid oil. *Indian.*

Boone knew the Indian had waited patiently for the dew to fall full and wet and soften the undergrowth, so that he could creep into camp noiselessly. Without a sound, Boone grasped his rifle and began to circle the clearing.

He must draw the hostile Indian off before he had a chance to use

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his knife or tomahawk. Grasping a stone, Boone tossed it into the campfire. An instant later there was an outcry and a scuffle, and two figures staggered embraced into the moonlight. One of them fell heavily to the ground and lay still.

"You woke me just in time, Dan'l," Simon Kenton said shakily. "I could smell the Injun's breath."

Flanders and Adam were awake now and watched in silence as Simon wiped the blade of his knife upon the grass.

Boone knelt by the dead Indian. The man lay face up, arms outstretched. A large hunting knife was sheathed in the scabbard at his waist, but in his right hand he still grasped a knife with a flat, sharp blade.

"Cherokee!" Boone said, surprised. He took the knife from the dead man's hand. It had a curiously rounded handle, made of dark hardwood striped with bands of lighter wood.

"I've never seen a knife like this before," he mused. "But then, the Cherokees are strangers to these parts. They must have come all the way East to join the Shawnees against us."

"Think there are more out there, Dan'l?" Flanders Callaway asked.

"No. He's alone—plenty lucky for us."

"'Specially for me," Simon Kenton laughed.

The next day, at noon, Boone sent Simon, Adam, and Flanders back to the settlement.

"Tell 'em I'll stay out another two days at the most," he said heavily, "and remind 'em of their promise to wait until I return before they start makin' lifelong enemies of one another."

The young men started soberly southward, Flanders leaning upon an oaken stick; he had painfully twisted his ankle during the latest search. Boone wandered alone in a south-easterly direction, zigzagging across the terrain, his eyes eager-busy for the faintest imprint in the earth, the slightest bruise upon bracken or bramble. But he found nothing.

Late the following afternoon the frontiersman arrived at the northern slope of the hill whose southern bluffs bordered the Kentucky River. From here one could look down upon Boonesborough and see the Wilderness Trail almost as far as Cumberland Gap.

Boone sat on a log, Tick-Licker across his knee, and considered his next move. He could detour around the hill to the south until he reached a fording place in the river, and that way he would be home by twilight. Or he could plod on up the hill, spend the night at the top, looking down on the settlement, and cross the river to-morrow morning.

He decided to climb the hill. The decision was easy. Last night he

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had dreamed of Squire Boone, his dead father, as he often did when he was troubled, and as usual the old man had spent the night scolding him. "Take your time, son, take your *time*," he said.

Daniel reached the top of the hill by twilight and sat down with a sigh beneath a big pine. Below, the Kentucky River curved like a black leather whip, and on its opposite side, in a meadow, lay the settlement—nine or ten cabins enclosed by the unfinished palisade, with four or five farms lying outside. In the blue haze of twilight and woodsmoke Boonesborough looked toylike and peaceful, and yet down there lurked an unknown renegade white man who had already murdered six of his own people.

Suddenly Boone saw movement in the clearing outside the palisade, far to the right. The tiny figure of a man emerged from the dark woods and walked along the footpath that led to the gate. From this distance, and in the dusk, Boone could not recognize him. A few seconds later a second man appeared in what seemed to be a crouch behind the first, hesitating a moment on the fringe of the woods as if uncertain whether to continue. Boone's eyes sharpened, his scalp prickling. Then the crouching man sprang upon the first and struck him upon the head. The victim dropped beside the path.

Boone had jumped to his feet, his mouth dry. He had actually witnessed the white Indian attacking another settler!

With horror the frontiersman saw the renegade lean over his victim, grasp him by the hair, lift his head clear of the ground, and reach for his knife. Automatically Boone clapped Tick-Licker to his shoulder and fired into the air.

At the shot and its echo the white Indian below froze, his knife arrested in midair. Then he let go his victim's hair, sheathed his knife, and scuttled back into the woods.

Even before the renegade had disappeared, Boone was dashing down the hill, back the way he had come; he could not descend the steep bluffs on the river side. And then, half-way down, Boone jolted to a halt. *The attacker had fled with an unmistakable limp*—and *just yesterday Flanders Callaway had turned his ankle on the trail.*

Long before Boone reached the settlement, a farmer searching for his cow came upon the man lying upon the path near the forest and carried him into the village. When Boone arrived, he found that the man he had believed dead was fully conscious and enjoying the attentions bestowed upon him. What was more, the victim was sitting up in bed in Boone's own cabin! It was young Adam Barr.

"Adam was almost killed by an

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Indian, papa," Jemima told her father excitedly. "When they brought him in all bloody, somebody had to take care of him. And I knew he was your favorite scout."

Boone looked sadly at his daughter. She was certainly beyond the age of rag dolls! He turned to Adam.

"You didn't see who struck you?"

"No, Dan'l, I didn't. Just felt a clump on the back of the head, and the next I knew I thought I was in heaven, what with Jemima bendin' over me and all."

The look the two "young 'uns" gave one another sent Boone hastily out of his cabin.

"He was a white man, and he limped," Boone later that evening told a meeting around the forge. Torchlight fell harshly on his gaunt face, and his blue eyes were frozen with resolve. "We've had every man walk before us here except Captain Bush, who's away at Harrodsburg, and William Coomes whose wife tells me he's on a hunt. We've got to face the fact. No one limps except Flanders Callaway."

"We've explained that it couldn't have been Flanders!" Colonel Callaway roared. "He was with me and three others squarin' timber until dark! Speak up, Clarke, Weston, Purcell—tell Boone again!"

Flanders himself stood white-faced to one side of the forge, watching Boone.

"Look at Flanders," Boone said harshly. "He dislikes me now because I p'inted a finger at him. Nobody likes to have a finger p'inted at him, even if he is innocent. I told you, Colonel, that suspicion would divide our settlement, and so it will."

"What will you do, then?" the Colonel demanded.

"What must be done. We shall put all single males—except those who came here with us from Virginia—outside the palisade, and bar the settlement against them until such time as the renegade reveals himself or runs away!"

A growl of resentment rose.

"You're puttin' us out to die," one of the bachelors cried. "What if the Indians come?"

"There's no immediate danger of attack. I'm hoping that once he's put outside the walls, the renegade will leave of his own accord."

"We don't like it! We won't go!" others shouted.

Boone turned to the married men with families. They were fewer than the bachelors, but with their sons, daughters, and wives they outnumbered them.

"Six men scalped in the last month and an attempted seventh to-night. Do you want to go on takin' chances?"

"We'll put 'em out by force, if necessary," one married man said, and there was a shout of agreement.

"Our sons and daughters and

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wives can handle rifles, too," said another.

A shocked silence fell. Boone began calling out the names of the single men.

"Seventeen altogether," he said at last. "We'll move married men inside for the present, to give housing to the single ones outside."

Callaway stepped up to Boone and swung him around angrily. "You called out my nephew's name! You're putting him outside the wall!"

"I'm afraid so, Colonel," Boone said slowly. "Have you forgotten that Flanders spent a year alone at Martin's Station while you returned to Virginia to fetch the rest of your family? We don't know for sure what happened to him in that year. Can't take chances. Even my scout Adam Barr, who was attacked by the renegade, will go with the others. He is a bachelor, and we know little about him."

"And that means me, too?" Simon Kenton asked wryly.

"You, too, Simon," Boone said.

"But why Adam?" Jemima wailed, her face puckered up to hold back her tears. Her mother stroked the girl's hand, and Boone, seated by the fire, looked at the empty bed from which, a few minutes before, Adam had been escorted to a meadow farmhouse.

"Because he could still be the renegate we're seekin'," Boone said, shaking his head. "By the way, appears you have another suitor, Jemima—Flanders Callaway. Young men have been known to kill for a woman, even for one skinny as a split rail! I'm not sure but that the Colonel's friends might lie for his nephew. Flanders could have planned to kill Adam, makin' the murder look like the work of the renegade. That would mean Adam could still be the renegade himslf."

"Flanders, maybe, papa, but never Adam!" Jemima flashed.

"Jemima's a young woman now, Dan'l," Rebecca said softly. "Goin' on seventeen."

"Seventeen?" Daniel looked reflective. "Now that's right strange . . ."

He took a stick and drew several numbers in the ash upon the hearth.

"What is, Dan'l?" his wife asked, puzzled.

"This is the year 1777. There are *seventeen* single men out there, and the renegade attacked our people *seven* times—if we count Adam. Seventeen, then seven—that leaves one seven unaccounted for, doesn't it?"

"You're seven kinds of a fool, Dan'l Boone," Rebecca retorted.

"Danged if I ain't," the frontiersman said ruefully, crossing his fingers. "Just the same, I need another seven—just for luck!"

Dan'l Boone got his seven the next morning.

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After setting several men to work felling trees to fill in the unfinished sides of the palisade, Boone had decided to demonstrate his good will by visiting the bachelors in the open meadow.

They nodded to him coolly, but without animosity. When he came to the farmhouse where Adam was lodged, he found Simon Kenton by the injured young man's bedside. Both looked up from their game of checkers and greeted the frontiersman as if nothing had happened.

"The knock in the head's helped Adam's checker-playing," Simon said. "He's beat me four times."

"I'm gettin' up today, Dan'l," Adam said apologetically. "Simon and I are goin' on a hunt up Twitty's fort way to-morrow morning."

"You take it easy, younker—you got quite a crack."

"You really think he meant to scalp me?" Adam asked.

"Believe me, he did!"

A cry from the meadow drew Boone and Simon Kenton outside. Jud Hawkins, a farmer, was running pell mell for the fort, yelling at the top of his voice. Boone caught him and held him fast.

"What in thunder's happened?" Boone demanded.

"William Coomes! They just found him dead in the brush in the south meadow. He was sculped!"

"When?"

"Last night, I reckon. He's stiff with the frost."

Cussing, Boone let the man go. The farmer went bucketing off to the stockade, shouting the gruesome news.

"I thought I scared the renegade off," Daniel muttered, "but he must have waylaid Coomes as he came back from his hunt." He turned to Kenton abruptly. "Now don't take offense, Simon, but I want to clear my own men first—"

Kenton nodded. "Last night 'round twilight I was choppin' wood for Miz Boone. From right after supper until they brought in Adam. You can ask her, Dan'l."

Boone's blue eyes watched him.

"And after that," Simon went on, "I spent all night with Adam, by his bed. We didn't sleep much, talked a lot. He'll tell you. And a funny thing. Flanders came in late last night and was right friendly. Made up with Adam, they even shook hands. So that's over—"

Suddenly a strange flicker crossed Boone's face.

Kenton asked, "What is it, Dan'l?"

"I just remembered. I got my other seven. William Coomes was seven feet tall!"

And the final seven did bring Daniel luck—of a sort.

The next morning, Sunday, just after the community Bible reading, a party of four Cherokees arrived upon the north bank of the Kentucky, and waved a white flag in token of their peaceful intentions.

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Boone alerted the single men in the meadow cabins, and they stood rifle-ready behind their windows while Boone himself poled the raft across the stream and ferried the party back to the settlement.

The leader was Hanging Maw, who made it clear that he had information to sell. Boone struck a bargain at once with a keg of whiskey, a quarter-bolt of red cloth, and two hand-mirrors, and learned the unpalatable news that Blackfish, the Shawnee chief, was massing his men and presently would sweep down the Warrior's Path to try to drive out the white settlers.

When business was concluded, Boone sat upon a blanket before the gate with the warriors, surrounded by the curious settlers, and held out his arm straight with customary ceremony and said: "Hanging Maw has been a good friend. May the Great Father prosper him and his people."

Hanging Maw reached to his belt and took out a knife, grasping it by the blade, and holding out the haft to Boone. Boone recognized the design—the alternate stripes of light and dark woods.

"Grasp knife of friendship, O Wide Mouth," the Indian said. "We have heard of you far to the west, and Hanging Maw would be thy brother."

Boone grasped the knife. "Ain't you afeared, Hanging Maw, that when you pull that knife a man might mistake your intentions?"

Hanging Maw shrugged.

"This is Friendship Knife. No used for killing. Only for eating."

Boone was on his feet in an instant. The Indians stiffened.

"I know now who the renegade is!" Boone cried.

"Who, Dan'l who?" the settlers clamored.

Colonel Callaway stepped up and peered fiercely into Boone's eyes.

"Make no false accusations, Boone!" he growled.

Boone said curtly, "I'll keep my counsel until I've proved it. Where are my scouts?"

"One of *them?*" several in the crowd asked, awed. Boone caught sight of his good wife Rebecca among them, her face strained.

"They went on a hunting trip together to Twitty's fort," the Colonel said in a trembling voice.

"No, they didn't!" Jud Hawkins cried. "They were goin' to, then they learned that Jemima Boone had paddled downriver—"

"Yes, yes," other said, "we saw them take Flanders Callaway's boat and follow her."

"Jemima out on the river!" Horror struck, Boone turned to his wife. "Why did you let her?"

White-faced, Rebecca answered: "She said she was goin' with friends, Dan'l. I didn't know she'd be alone. Just after Bible reading, 'twas, before the Indians came."

But Boone was already running

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across the meadow, rifle in hand, towards the river. There were no boats left; he would have to pole the raft. He jumped upon the raft and was out into mid-stream before the others reached the bank.

"Take me with you, Boone!" Colonel Callaway shouted, waving frantically.

"I'll do this alone!" he shouted.

But Boone was busy poling. Although the stream was low and the current sluggish, he soon turned the bend to the north and was out of sight.

He bent to his task of keeping the raft centered in the current. His eyes swept the banks ahead for sign of the boats; his ears strained for the sound of gunfire.

And then suddenly, a half hour later, he saw the boats and heard the shot almost in the same instant. Boone swiftly poled into the left bank and jumped ashore a hundred rods above where he had glimpsed two boats drawn up upon the bank.

Wading silently in the shallow water, Daniel stole downstream and halted behind the thick trunk of a hemlock a few feet from the nearest craft. He could hear Flanders Callaway speaking, and Jemima's laugh. But the gunshot?

Boone straightened up and strolled casually up to the four young people seated among the dry leaves at the foot of a huge beech.

"Papa!" Jemima cried in surprise and embarrassment. "They—they followed me."

"I know," Boone said pleasantly. "Shootin' for the sport, boys?"

"I was showin' Jemima how I could bark a squirrel like you, sir," Adam Barr said, reloading his rifle.

"He shot the branch right out from under it," Jemima laughed again. "Just as good as you, papa!"

Adam went over and set a billet of wood upon a fallen tree trunk.

"We've scared away the squirrels," he said, "but try hittin' this, Flanders."

"That's different," Flanders complained. "I'm not good with a low shot. You try it, Simon."

But Simon Kenton wasn't listening. He was looking thoughtfully at Boone.

"Why did you follow us, Dan'l?"

"Just had a feelin'."

"You needn't worry about Jemima when I'm with her," Flanders said earnestly.

"Which one of you wights thought of followin' her?" Boone drawled.

"It was Flanders," Adam said hastily.

Flanders looked sheepish. "I hope you don't mind, sir." He raised his rifle. "I'll try this shot!"

His gun roared and the billet stood untouched.

"I told you I was no good with low shots! Your turn, Simon."

Simon took careful aim and squeezed the trigger. The billet exploded in a shower of slivers.

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Flanders ran and found another target and placed it upon the trunk.

"Your shot, Dan'l," Simon said, turning to Boone.

"No, I'll just keep my gun loaded, if you don't mind, Simon," the frontiersman said, bringing up his rifle. "Because if I shoot, then Adam's gun will be the only one loaded, and that'll give him the edge he's been workin' for."

"Adam?" Jemima cried, bewildered.

"Lay down your rifle, Adam Barr," Boone snapped.

The young man began to protest. Then, reading the purpose in Boone's eyes, he let his rifle slide into the dead leaves at his feet.

"Why should I—?" he stammered.

"So you could hold the others off, take Jemima away with you in the boat, and escape back to your friends, the Cherokees!"

"Adam's the renegade?" Simon asked incredulously.

"How can you be sure?" Flanders demanded.

"A Cherokee offered me the friendship knife to-day. It was the same kind of knife held by the Indian who crept into our camp the other night. *They never kill with it.* The Indian who visited us came only to deliver a friendly message to one of his blood brothers!"

"But he crept up on me!" Simon exclaimed.

"He mistook you for Adam—you both have the same blond hair. But I knew it wasn't you who were the friend to the Indians, Simon, because at the very hour the renegade struck, you were with my wife. And it couldn't have been Flanders, because he has dark hair."

"Look out, Boone!" Simon yelled.

Adam dove low, heading for Daniel's knees, but Boone struck quickly up with his boot. Adam howled and curled up at the foot of the beech tree, and Daniel half turned towards his daughter. In that instant Adam seized his own rifle and shot. But the frontiersman was ready for him. Adam's shot went wild, and he crashed back against the beech trunk with Boone's rifle ball in his chest.

"But Adam was attacked by the renegade!" Jemima said, as she sat upon a log with her back to the leat-covered figure of the dead scout. "How could he have been guilty?"

"Not by a longshot," Boone said grimly. "You see, it must have been William Coomes I spied come out of the woods, not Adam. Adam was the one skulkin' behind. Adam seemed like he was crouchin' but any normal-size man would look like a dwarf alongside of seven-foot William Coomes! Then, just as Adam was about to scalp Coomes, I shot off my rifle. Adam realized he was bein' watched, knew that at that distance he

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couldn't be recognized. So he ran off into the woods limping, knowing that whoever was watchin' would remember the limp—and blame the attack on Flanders. Flanders was his rival, remember."

"You say he didn't harm Coomes," Simon said. "But Coomes was found scalped later!"

"Adam figgered he'd not only mark Flanders as the renegade, but make himself look innocent at the same time. So, while I was runnin' down the back of the hill, Adam went back to Coomes and scalped him, hid his body in the brush, then wounded himself in the head, *and took Coomes's place on the path*. And there he stayed until somebody obligin'ly found him and took him to my cabin."

Jemima burst into tears, and young Flanders Callaway looked as if a Cherokee arrow had found its way into his heart. Daniel Boone concealed a grin.

"Reckon you can take Jemima home now, Flanders," he said gravely.

When Flanders and Jemima were gone, Simon Kenton and Daniel Boone carried the renegade's body to the other boat, and then returned to the beech tree for their rifles.

"They danged well won't put a marker on *his* grave," Simon said.

"Mebbe not," Boone replied. "But we might leave some sign where he was killed."

And striding over to the trunk of the beech against which Adam Barr had died, the frontiersman began carving away at the smooth bark with his hunting knife. When he had finished, Simon read the words aloud slowly:

D. BOONE
KILLED A. BAR
ON THIS TREE
IN THE YEAR
1777

Ending of Juan Page's
"In Broad Daylight"

In that instant, Luis Aparicio streaked for second base, and every fan in the grandstand and bleachers knew he had the bag stolen; Nellie crouched at home plate, waving his bat and grinning. . .

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Old Tobias kept fit by gardening—and kept sane by hanging on to his sense of humor . . .

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

by MICHAEL GILBERT

"I'M SORRY TO HEAR THAT," SAID Bohun. "When did you say it happened?"

"Last night," said the telephone.

"Peacefully, I hope," said Bohun. "Of course, it wasn't really unexpected, was it?"

The telephone agreed that it wasn't in the least unexpected.

"He was—let me see—would have been ninety this spring. That's a fine old age. Will you be wanting me to come down?"

In theory, when a valued client dies, the family solicitor always hurries to the house. In fact, there is little he can do that cannot be done, and better done, by the doctor, the vicar, and the next of kin.

The telephone went on talking for quite a long time. Bohun listened, a tiny puzzled frown between his eyes.

"All right," he said. "I'll come along. But it looks as if what you really want is a competent police searcher."

Roly Craine, his articled clerk, looked up, as a dog that hears the click of the front door. Outside, in New Square, the trees and grass were green with a London spring.

"A trip into the country," he breathed.

"Yes," said Bohun. "Carshalton. It's old Tobias Buckley. He died last night. They've lost the will."

As they had the railway carriage to themselves Bohun filled in some background.

"The real tragedy of growing old," he said, "is that you lose things without realizing it. Some people lose their wind and waistline and others lose their wits."

Roly, who was nineteen, said tolerantly, "I've got an aunt, sir, who thinks she's a tortoise. She eats lettuce leaves off the edge of the table."

"Just concentrate on listening," said Bohun. "As I was about to add, Tobias was particularly lucky. He remained absolutely sane and just about as fit as anyone can be after more than four-score years in this vale. He kept fit by gardening and he kept sane by hanging onto his sense of humor. I don't mean that he played practical jokes. He'd got over that stage. His sense of humor had mellowed. It was of the quiet, reflective kind. Not the sort that appealed to Gertrude and Am-

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brose. Not in the least."

"The second-cousins-umpteen-times-removed who lived with him?"

"To be strictly accurate," said Bohun, "they were no sort of relatives at all. They called themselves second cousins, but in fact they were just hangers-on. They've lived with, and on, Tobias for years, and I have no doubt they hoped that if they hung on long enough he would leave them everything in his will. He was a bachelor, you see, and his mother and father were only children. They've long been dead, of course. His only brother died a bachelor, too."

"Then," said Roly, casting his mind back over the rules of intestate succession which he had been learning only the week before, "unless they can find his will it looks as if the Crown will nab the lot. Was he well off?"

"Extremely well off."

"How very tiresome for Gertrude and Ambrose," said Roly. "I bet they're turning the place upside down."

"I wouldn't be surprised," admitted Bohun.

When they arrived at The Retreat, a solid, unpretentious two-story building with rather more garden than the normal, they found a grim-faced Ambrose, a red-eyed Gertrude, and a house that looked as if it had suffered the attentions of a thorough-going gang of burglars and been hit by a tornado shortly afterward.

They ate an impromptu lunch, laid on a hurriedly reassembled table (it had been turned upside down and its flaps unscrewed), sitting on chairs the seats of which had been removed, cut open, and roughly sewn together again.

"I think," said Bohun, surveying the battlefield, "that we may be approaching this from the wrong angle. To start with, do we know that he really did leave a will?"

"I'm certain of it," said Gertrude. "You know that he had one before —I believe you made it—"

"I drew it up," agreed Bohun, "about six years ago. At the beginning of this year I was present when he revoked it by destroying it, in the presence of myself and my partner."

"I believe," suggested Ambrose, "that we benefited under the former will."

"It may be so," said Bohun. "I forget the details. They can be of no importance now, surely?"

"Of course not, of course not," said Ambrose. "But he made another one. He wrote it out himself. He as good as told us so."

"When was that?"

"About ten days ago."

"Did he, though?" said Bohun. "That's interesting. Did he say he had *made* it? Or that he was *going* to make it? In fact, tell me exactly what he did say."

"It was after tea," said Ambrose.

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"He'd spent the afternoon in the garden. You know he was mad about gardening." Bohun thought he detected a certain pettishness in Ambrose's voice. Ambrose was not an outdoor type.

"He'd finished digging that big bed the other side of the lawn." Ambrose went to the window and pointed. "He'd cleared out a lot of old stuff and was going to put in something or other else. I can't really think why he bothered. He'd enough money to pay for a dozen gardeners."

Bohun looked at the flower bed. It was the show bed of the garden —nearly eighty feet long and perhaps twenty feet deep, and tilted up slightly. When filled with flowers it must have looked almost theatrically beautiful.

"Did he do that?" said Bohun, surprised.

The bed was pitted with holes.

"No, no," said Ambrose. "*I* did that. I was telling you. He said to us, 'I hope you'll keep the garden nice when I'm gone.' I said, of course we would. I'm not keen on it myself but, after all, we could always get someone in. He then said, very seriously, 'If you keep the garden, you'll find that the garden will keep you.' He said that to both of us."

"It was perfectly obvious," said Gertrude. "Absolutely in character. He'd made his new will, sealed it up in a tin, or something, and buried it in the garden."

"We used to do that with Easter eggs," said Roly. He was disregarded.

"I see," said Bohun. "I gather, however, that you haven't found it yet?"

"It's a big garden," said Ambrose sadly. "We started on that bed, as it was the last one he was working on. Oh, here comes the Vicar. And Doctor Plumb."

Two men were coming up the path from the gate. They were evidently familiar with the house, for they cut across the lawn, stopped to stare at the devastated flower bed, and then turned aside and came up to the French windows.

Ambrose let them in—a little sulkily, it seemed to Bohun.

After introductions, Dr. Plumb said explosively, "What in the world have you been doing to the garden?"

"As a matter of fact," said Ambrose, "I—that is to say, we—have been looking for something."

"Not found the will yet?" inquired the Vicar. He sounded uncommonly cheerful, and it occurred to Bohun that neither of these old friends of Tobias Buckley liked Gertrude or Ambrose.

"It'll turn up," said Gertrude. "Is there anything we can do for you? If not, we happen to be rather busy—"

"Well," said the Vicar, "we—"

Bohun interrupted. "I wonder," he said, addressing himself to the Doctor and the clergyman, "if you

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would mind stepping outside with me for a minute?"

Although he spoke with studied moderation, there was something in his voice that brought their heads up.

"Why, of course," said Dr. Plumb.

"You'll excuse us?" said the Vicar, preserving his manners.

Gertrude nodded coldly. The three men walked across the lawn.

"What exactly," said Bohun, "was Tobias planning for this bed?"

"Not planning," said Dr. Plumb. "He'd carried it out. Not much chance of it coming up now, though. Looks like a battlefield!"

"What was it?"

"*Zinnia florata*. New type. Very neat, compact plant, with small leaves and a blue flower. Nurserymen use it sometimes for advertisement beds."

"Advertisement?"

"You know, 'Welcome to Smith and Brown's Nursery Garden,' all in flowers. That sort of thing. It's small, and a strong, steady grower. You can write quite long sentences in it."

"Can you, now?" said Bohun. "That's extremely interesting. Would you by any chance happen to know exactly what message Tobias had planted in that flower bed?"

"We don't know what the message was," said the Vicar. "But it was something of sentimental interest, and it contained his name. We were there when he finished it. He drew his signature in the soil, and scattered in the seeds."

"And then—?" said Bohun, a light in his eyes.

"Why, then," said Dr. Plumb, "as we were his oldest friends, you know, he got us both to scratch our names, too, and fill them up with seed. It seemed a silly thing to do, but we would neither of us have wished to refuse. He was dying. I'd given him a month. We all knew he'd never live to see the flowers come up."

"And now," the Vicar sounded quite unclerical in his anger, "those two—those two vandals, in their sordid greed for gold, have made quite certain that no one will ever enjoy them. I doubt if a single seedling survives."

Bohun stood swaying on his heels, looking dreamily at the scarred and pitted flower bed. He agreed with the Vicar. Tobias Buckley's last message would never now see the light.

"What a case it would have made," he said at last. "It couldn't have stopped short of the House of Lords."

"What on earth," said Dr. Plumb. "Why, good Heavens—"

"His last Will and Testament. Planted in *Zinnia Florata*. Something quite simple. 'I leave everything to Gertrude and Ambrose.' Signed by him and his signature witnessed by the two of you. All in flowers. And then that precious pair

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had to dig it all up again. Oh, dear, oh, dear."

The three men were consumed with such wild and helpless laughter that Roly came running, and even Gertrude and Ambrose stalked unwillingly out to see what the joke could be.

"'If you keep the garden, the garden will keep you'," said Bohun. It was hours later, and they were in the train, heading for London.

"Yes, sir," said Roly. "But would it have been effective—a will made like that?"

"Good gracious," said Bohun, "I don't know. I'm just a solicitor. You know much more law than I do. Look it up in one of your books when you get back to the office."

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The best contemporary writer in the "hard-boiled" school made his début as Kenneth Millar, then became in turn John Macdonald, John Ross Macdonald and Ross Macdonald. Keep your eyes open: don't miss him under any name. Reprints: THE THREE ROADS (1948 by K.M.; now by R.M., Bantam A2096, 35¢), THE DROWNING POOL (1950 by J.R.M.; Pocket Books 2821, 25¢), THE GALTON CASE (1959 by R.M.; Bantam A2059, 35¢). The latest:

★★★★ **THE FERGUSON AFFAIR, *by Ross Macdonald*** (Knopf, $3.50)
Attorney Bill Gunnarson takes a charity case and finds himself in the thick of professional criminals, questionable police and amateurs with warped psyches. If you eagerly read Hammett and Chandler but skip their degenerate imitators, this is the boy for you.

★★★★ **WATCHER IN THE SHADOWS, *by Geoffrey Household*** (Atlantic-Little, Brown, $3.95)
Self-defense against a shadowy but resolute assassin becomes, in the hands of this master storyteller, a duel almost as powerfully engrossing as his celebrated ROGUE MALE.

★★★ **ACT OF MERCY, *by Francis Clifford*** (Coward-McCann, $3.95)
Simple act of human charity all but destroys three lives in a South American revolution—tense, high-pitched yet human pursuit-thriller.

★★★ **ROAD BLOCK, *by Hillary Waugh*** (Crime Club, $2.95)
Nice neat maneuvering of the details of a complex payroll robbery and the counterstrategies of a smalltown police chief.

★★★ **IN SPITE OF THUNDER, *by John Dickson Carr*** (Harper, $3.50)
Dr. Gideon Fell (in Switzerland this time) explicates another "impossible" murder, with its origins in Berchtesgaden, 1939.

Among reprinted short-story collections (35¢ each) are W. Somerset Maugham's classic of espionage, ASHENDEN (1928; Avon T-420); the fiendishly ingenious NEW ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN (1940; Pocket Books 6011); and Agatha Christie's THE MOUSETRAP (1950 as THREE BLIND MICE; Dell D354), in which 8 good shorts atone for a surprisingly bad novelet.

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SHORT STORY WORKSHOP

"The Plight of the Newts, Salamanders, Fish, et cetera" is a "first story." It was written as a class assignment in the Creative Writing Course given by one of your Editors at the University of Texas in the Fall-Winter semester of 1958-1959. Circumstances too complicated to explain in an editorial foreword have prevented us from publishing this "first story" sooner; but as we look around at the time of this writing, we cannot see that conditions in the world have changed importantly—the implications of all the mysteries in this contemporary little fable are as strong today as they were late in 1958. (If at press time the preceding statement is no longer true, we shall join in the universal relief and happiness.)

Parker Nunley is a native Texan, in his late twenties, and a graduate of the University of Texas; he was a psychology major as an undergraduate, an anthropology student in his postgraduate work. He served four years in the Air Force, and was stationed at bases all the way from the South Pacific to Coney Island. When his "first story" was purchased, he was getting himself (we are quoting) in a position, both psychologically and anthropologically, in which he "must write to eat." You know what they say about hungry prizefighters; the same is probably true about writers . . .

"The Plight, et cetera" contains many mysteries. See if you can spot them all—we counted at least a dozen of them. But the largest mystery in this "modern Aesop"—the colossal mystery implied by the interlocking totality of all the other mysteries—is perhaps insoluble . . . although we profoundly hope not.

The Plight of the Newts, Salamanders, Fish, et cetera

by PARKER NUNLEY

FROM A DISTANCE THE POND looked as peaceful and placid as the heavens on a clear night. Everything seemed to be running smoothly, and all was well. Once things had really been tranquil. That was before the folk who run the pond, the beavers, had begun

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fighting with each other, but since then there has only been an occasional lull between battles.

That's the way it is now, a lull between battles. Just like sitting in the eye of a terrible storm—after being thrown and dashed about, there is nothing to do but wait for it to happen again.

Many of the pond folk would agree that their troubles were chiefly the result of misunderstandings. They realized this, but didn't know how to go about understanding one another. The perch fought the minnows; the larger fish fought the perch; but nobody fought the beavers. Everybody depended on them.

The beavers were responsible for building the dam that held the waters which were the life-blood for all the rest. Traditionally, the beavers had clung together in a group aloof, but performing their job with irreproachable precision. Some of the great groups from the past had been led by such historic names as Alex and Julius Beaver, Beth and Vicky Beaver, and recently, Sam Beaver.

Sam had been a sickly youngster. Feeble, ignorant, and unprepossessing, he had survived his early days largely because he was ignored. It was probably this self-sufficiency which he had been forced to develop that led him to be what he is today—a Big Beaver. His first self-assertion was felt throughout the pond when he decreed, to the surprise of everyone, that certain areas were off-limits to a large portion of the pond folk, other beavers especially. Of course the newts, salamanders, fish, et cetera were powerless to contest the dictum of any beaver, even if they had wanted to. The other beavers, though slightly miffed, let Sam have his way.

All this time Sam was growing larger and stronger and many of the newts, salamanders, fish, et cetera who were small but wise saw that Sam would be a good fellow to follow, so they began taking his side in arguments. Even a majority of beavers soon fell in behind Sam and for a while things sailed along smoothly. Sam got generous and began helping all his trusty followers. It might be pointed out here that Sam seldom helped anybody who he figured might never help him. So, as it turned out, Sam's popularity was partially based on fair-weathered friends. He was generally unsuspecting and naive. His favorite statement was that he would listen to any newt, salamander, fish, et cetera who followed him, and in this way he became aware of the wants and needs of his followers. This, of course, didn't apply to the other beavers.

Finally, not too long ago, the inevitable happened. Sam's leadership was seriously challenged by a young beaver known as Red. From the first, Red had shown peculiar fea-

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tures: he had matured very fast and grew strong at an early age, but the strangest thing about him was his amazing constitution—he didn't even have to pay any attention to it! This was probably the chief difference between Sam and Red. Sam had a very weak constitution during his early years but finally got it in order, although he still has to keep an eye on it, thus giving an edge to Red who isn't bothered with such difficulties.

As the days wore on, the friction grew hotter and hotter between the two. Each realized that the other wanted to achieve the same goal, but by different means. This realization didn't help make them any friendlier. And while they argued, the whole dam was going to pot—the water was running out faster than it was running in.

Many of the pond folk tried to make themselves heard, but the two Big Beavers paid no attention. It seemed that regardless of what their earlier policies had been, no one else had a say in what was going on now. That is, Sam got where he could ignore his constitution nearly as much as Red—they both were healthy beavers. In spite of the obvious fact that they were both preparing for a great battle, neither of them would admit it. Each of them claimed self-defense instead, and what could any newt, salamander, fish, et cetera do about that? There was nothing wrong in defending yourself. And so, in the name of defense, the two biggest beavers began to perform the most unusual feats.

Sam began smacking the water with his tail, hoping to impress not only those who were his followers but also those who were not. He got a lot of new followers that way. When Red saw how successful Sam's tail-smacking had become, he began smacking his tail too. Well, all this movement in the water stirred up a lot of mud, and some feared that if it got any worse, many of the newts, salamanders, fish, et cetera would get sick and die.

The disturbance even aroused old Albert Salamander who had been hibernating down in the bottom of the pond. Taking full advantage of his saintly reputation, he pronounced that all this foolishness must end or the pond would soon no longer be a fit place in which to live. Of course the two big beavers ignored him.

After Sam and Red had made their big splashes, they could see that they were in just about the same position as before. So they started looking for a new attraction. Red was the first to find it. He discovered that he could flip rocks with his tail. So, after some secret practice, he finally flipped a rock completely out of the pond.

Well, this was really something, and many of Sam's former friends decided that Red had the best show after all and switched over to him. Sam, not to be upstaged, hastily

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climbed up on a large rock where he could be seen by everybody. From there he announced that he had been able to flip rocks with his tail for quite some time and would now demonstrate his ability for all to see.

He then proceeded to place a small rock on his tail and gave a mighty heave. The pebble just barely cleared the big rock he was standing on. Most of the pond folk thought it was hilarious, but not Sam. He went right to work strengthening his tail and soon he too was able to throw rocks beyond the pond.

This type of contest could probably have lasted for many months had the two not grown impatient. It was obvious that the dam badly needed repairing, and besides, they were straining themselves near exhaustion in their efforts to win friends and influence newts, salamanders, fish, et cetera. They decided that a final meeting would be held on the top of the dam.

At the appointed time Sam and his group and Red and his group met, each leader determined not to yield. Of course nothing was accomplished except that everyone grew quite angry. Finally the lesser followers backed away and formed into a third group near the center of the pond, with each individual at first cheering for his representative beaver.

Meanwhile, back on the dam, there was a terrible battle in progress. The two biggest beavers in their frenzy had begun to smash at the dam with their now powerful tails, and the battle seemed to be who could knock away most of the dam. Water was running freely, and now the pond folk really became worried. Old Albert again made an attempt to be heard, but was caught in the wave of claims and counter claims that washed over the dam, and his voice was drowned. And all the scattered cries of agreement with old Albert turned into moans of despair . . .

And that's the way it is now. All the newts, salamanders, fish, et cetera are watching helplessly as the two Big Beavers battle it out on the dam. The key log is all that holds the dam together—smash it and the pond will perish.

Another workshop story in our series of "firsts" . . . Henriette McClelland's "Coming, Mama" was written as a class assignment in the Creative Writing Course given by one of your Editors this past Fall and Winter. In her classwork Mrs. McClelland revealed a penchant for violent characters and melodramatic situations. "Coming, Mama," however, is one of her milder stories, and therefore less

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powerful in impact; but it has a cleanness and clarity, both of characterization and content, not found too often in "first stories."

Mrs. McClelland's note about herself was also concise and clear. She is married and has two children in school. Most of her energy has been devoted to studying music and teaching piano. She has always wanted to write, and began working at it seriously a few years ago. "The hours of work and discouragement," she concluded in her letter, "are worth the thrill of breaking into print."

COMING, MAMA

by HENRIETTE McCLELLAND

LUCY, LUCY! WHERE ARE YOU, LUcy? Why don't you answer me?"

Lucy sighed wearily as she put down her glass of lemonade.

"Isn't that your mother calling you?" Edward asked.

"Yes," Lucy said, rising. "Stay a little while. I'll be downstairs in a few minutes. Coming, Mama," she called.

"Where have you been?" her mother demanded.

"I was downstairs talking to Edward."

"It's time for my medicine! I'd think you'd remember, considering how sick I am."

"I'm sorry, Mama. I'll get it right away. Do you want a cold towel for your head?"

"That might help. It seems to me you could spend a little more time visiting with me and less time with Edward. I think I deserve some consideration."

Lucy counted out the pills for her mother. "Edward was telling me about his promotion."

"What did he get it for, attendance?"

"Oh, Mama! Edward's very dependable! Now you rest and I'll turn the radio on to your program, and later I'll read to you before you go to sleep."

"Sleep! I just can't sleep at night. Dr. Larson will have to give me some stronger sleeping pills."

"Perhaps you sleep too much in the afternoon," Lucy suggested.

"That's beside the point. I need my rest or I'll never get my strength back. How's Edward's mother? She hasn't been to see me lately."

"She's visiting her sister in the country," Lucy said, smoothing the bedspread.

"Everyone gets around but me!" whined the old lady. "Where are the chocolates Mrs. Evans brought over?"

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"They're on the bureau, Mama."

"Well, bring them here! I can't eat them when they're over there. Honestly, Lucy, if you'd only use your head!"

Patiently Lucy brought the candy to her mother. "Comfy now?"

"I suppose you can't wait to go back to Edward. Well, run along. I'm used to being alone. When is Dr. Larson coming?"

"He should be along soon, dear. Now here's your program."

Quietly she slipped out of the room and down the stairs. Nineteen years ago she would have been in no hurry to get back to the plump, balding man on the porch, but now—

She found Edward waving the local paper in disgust. "Does your mother always cut out news items?" he asked.

"Why, yes. She tucks them in letters I write to her friends who've left town."

"I don't see how you can read the paper after she finishes with it. See how silly this sounds: 'Lady has large comfortable room. Prefers gentlemen!' The real ad reads: 'Lady has large comfortable room. Prefers gentlemen boarders. Meals, laundry. Call 4769' With even one line missing the item means something else altogether."

"I know," Lucy agreed. "Sometimes it's very confusing to read the paper after Mama's had it. But Edward, isn't that your telephone number?"

"Yes. I'm looking for boarders for my mother." He put down the paper and moved next to her on the glider. "You know the house on South Street that belonged to my uncle who died last month? Well, I've inherited it—and a little cash too!"

"Oh, Edward! How wonderful! It's a darling house. I've always admired it."

"You know, Lucy, I've been thinking that if I were to marry a girl who would bring her share—linens, dishes, sort of an old-fashioned dowry—we'd be better off than many folks are after twenty years of marriage." Clumsily he groped for her hand. "I've asked you to marry me before, but you've always put me off. Now I'm asking you for the last time. "No," he said, as she started to interrupt. "Don't say anything tonight. Think it over and give me a definite answer in two weeks."

"Oh, Edward, how can I?" she said, sighing.

"Your mother has a pension, and South Street is close enough for you to check on her. We could have a simple wedding and take a short trip to Niagara Falls. Your father left you enough money to furnish the house. If I can locate a couple of boarders for my mother she can support herself. We could have a very good life together."

"Oh, Edward," she murmured. "It would be wonderful but—"

"Don't say anything now, Lucy.

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Think about it for two weeks." He let go of her hand. "I'm going to move along now. Here comes Dr. Larson," he said as an elderly man got out of the car in front of the house.

Dr. Larson waved a greeting to them. "Why are you two sitting there?" he asked. "Why aren't you down at the church bazaar? I hear it's the best one they've ever had."

"You know I couldn't leave Mama," Lucy said reproachfully. "She's waiting for you, Doctor."

Dr. Larson raised his eyebrows. "Just why can't you leave her for a few hours, Lucy? No, I'll go up alone," he said as she started to follow him. "You sit here and rest, you look tired. I know the way by now."

Lucy sat down and closed her eyes. In the distance she could hear the music from the bazaar and the sound of merry voices. "I can't get to a bazaar, let alone to Niagara Falls," she thought, choking back the bitter feeling which came over her occasionally. "Why must I be a prisoner? When will I be able to do anything more than run to the store, or next door for a quick cup of coffee with Mrs. Evans?" Her thoughts traveled to the little house on South Street. She could picture it with white curtains, and red geraniums in the window boxes. "She'll never let me go," she thought resentfully. "Not while she lives."

Then the ugly thought came into her mind again. "I wish she'd die. Why doesn't she die!" She put her hand over her mouth. "Dear Heaven, forgive me for being so wicked," she whispered, and closed her eyes again. letting the image of Niagara Falls blur her deeper thoughts.

"You're exhausted, Lucy!" Dr. Larson's voice woke her from a doze. "Your mother asked for sleeping pills, and I told her no; but I've changed my mind. I'll give you a prescription for something that will make her sleep because *you* need the rest." He sat down in the rocker and scribbled on his pad. "Just be careful—no more than one teaspoonful a night. Don't even tell her you have it. Wait until some night when she's very restless—or—" he winked at her—"some time when you want to run out for a few hours. Not that you would," he added under his breath.

He rocked for a few moments. "Edward's a sensible man," he said abruptly. "Are you going to marry him?"

She hesitated. "He's asked me to, but I can't leave Mama as long as she's an invalid."

"How old are you?"

"Almost forty," she admitted ruefully.

"You're an old maid, Lucy. How many chances will you have to marry someone like Edward? Oh, he's not exciting or romantic, but he's solid. Don't let life leave you too far behind. You've waited on

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your mother for nineteen years. She can afford help. You don't need to sacrifice your life. Maybe I shouldn't talk so much," he said, rising to leave. "I'll have this prescription sent to you and drop in next week."

Lucy went into the house and looked in the mirror. "I am an old maid," she thought. "It's true." The words cut her deeply. She had never thought of herself as getting old until now. The girls she had known in school were married, the men were settled or had moved away. Except for Edward no man had called on her in the past seven years. Who else would ask her to marry him? And while her mother lived what good would it do her? She buried her face in her hands.

"Lucy, Lucy! Where's my milk?"

She moved obediently. "I'm getting it," she called. "Coming, Mama."

Dr. Larson's words haunted her during the following days. She began to feel justified in the resentment she felt at her mother's demands. She went through the motions of carrying the trays up and downstairs a dozen times a day, of waiting on her, of reading to her and making her comfortable; but there was a burning anger growing in her heart which she dared not express until she realized that Edward had not called on her in a week.

"What if he met someone else?" she thought in panic. Fear began to gnaw at her. She wanted to marry him and see Niagara Falls, and have the little house on South Street.

"I've got to get out of here," she thought desperately. "I don't want to stay here until I'm too old to get married or to go any place. I deserve to enjoy life."

The thought of Edward's last visit, his proposal, the touch of his hand, overcame the misgivings she felt when she recalled his reference to her dowry and the furnishing of the house.

"Lucy, what's on your mind?" her mother demanded.

"I want to marry Edward," she blurted out suddenly. "He's asked me to marry him."

"He'll ask you again. When I'm dead and gone you'll have plenty of time to marry."

"No, I won't," Lucy said, sitting on the edge of the bed. "Look at me, Mama, my hair is getting gray. I'm not young any more. Mama, I'm an old maid!"

"Nonsense, Lucy! You'll have lots of chances yet. And if there's anything worse than being an old maid it's being a widow with an ungrateful daughter." She started to cry. "If you ever go away I'll cut you off in my will and leave everything to charity!"

Lucy swallowed hard. This was not an idle threat. She knew instinctively that Edward would not appreciate a penniless bride.

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"Papa said I should get some money when I got married."

"You're so greedy! When I die you get everything. My days are numbered, and you can do what you want after I'm dead."

Lucy dug her fingernails into the palms of her hands. The word "dead" rang a disturbing bell in her mind. She stared at the new bottle of medicine on the bureau.

"You just tell Edward to wait, and it won't be long, Lucy. I just feel it won't be long. I know I'm a burden—"

"Please, Mama!" Lucy said. "I won't leave you. Don't talk that way."

"Then you will say 'no' to Edward?"

"Why don't you tell him, Mama? It's so hard for me to say 'no'."

"Gladly, dear. You send him upstairs the next time he comes."

Lucy remembered Edward's words: "With even one line missing the item means something else altogether."

"No, Mama. You write him a letter," she said, clutching at the bureau.

"I'm no good at writing letters. You always write my letters for me."

Lucy brought her mother a pen and paper. "You write it, Mama, while I tidy up the room. I'll tell you what to say." She propped her mother up on some pillows.

"My, my, such trouble!" 'Dear Edward', she wrote. "What next?"

"Let's see," Lucy said, smoothing the blanket. "How about: 'My daughter Lucy has told me she will never marry while I live. I am not well and my days are numbered.' That will make him sorry for you, Mama. 'I love my daughter and want her to be happy.'"

With a pounding heart Lucy watched her mother write. "It's time for your program, Mama. You can finish it tomorrow." She took away the pencil and paper quickly. "Let me get you a cold towel for your head." She turned on the radio. "It's time for your medicine. Dr. Larson sent over something new. He says that if you take two tablespoonsful of this you'll feel much better tomorrow."

"Two tablespoons! That's a lot. Are you sure?"

Lucy looked carefully at the label. "Yes. It says, 'Two tablespoons before retiring.' It's a tonic."

"Another one of Dr. Larson's mild prescriptions. No wonder I don't get better."

With a shaking hand Lucy measured out the medicine and handed it to her mother.

"Call me when the program's over, Mama," she said faintly. "I'm going to ask Mrs. Evans over to have some lemonade with me."

She went on the porch and called to her next-door neighbor.

"How's your mother Lucy?" asked Mrs. Evans, sipping her drink.

"She's quite upset," Lucy said.

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"Tonight we had an argument. She called me an old maid and said I ought to marry Edward."

"Why don't you?" asked Mrs. Evans, solicitously. "Your mother is thinking of your future, and she's right, Lucy."

"I'll never, never leave Mama until she's better!" Lucy declared. "I just can't."

Mrs. Evans shook her head. "You're being foolish," she said.

After Mrs. Evans left, Lucy sat on the porch. She waited for her mother's voice, but all was still. She dozed off, thinking of the life ahead—red geraniums, white curtains, and Niagara Falls . . .

She woke in the early dawn. Quickly she ran upstairs. The radio was still playing, the light was on, and her mother was lying limp and cold against the pillows.

She put the bottle on the table next to the bed, with the pen and note to Edward. Then she screamed, loudly and long enough to awaken Mrs. Evans. Hysterically she told of falling asleep on the porch, of going upstairs and discovering her mother and the note. Dr. Larson was summoned and pronounced it a clear case of suicide.

"She must have suddenly realized what she was doing to Lucy," he said to Mrs. Evans. "Take her to your house, she's going to be very upset for a while."

During the next few weeks the whole town tried to help Lucy. Mr. Evans, a lawyer, settled the estate quickly. A buyer was found for the house, and the minister assured Lucy that, since it was her mother's last request, she and Edward should be married as soon as possible.

Edward said that his mother sent her love, and hoped they would forgive her for not attending the wedding. He explained that she couldn't leave his aunt, who was just recovering from a case of summer pneumonia.

Mrs. Evans helped Lucy pack for the trip and gave her a small wedding breakfast. The well-wishers put the suitcases in the car, and Edward, obviously nervous, started the car with a jerk as they drove off.

"I can't believe it," Lucy said over and over. "I can't believe it, Edward. Niagara Falls! Dinner in a restaurant! Do you like my suit? I'm so excited! But why are we stopping here?"

They had pulled up in front of his mother's house.

"Lucy, dear, I didn't want to tell you before—you've been through so much these last few weeks. I didn't want to upset you. Something terrible has happened."

"A few days ago I got word from my aunt that mother fell. She'll probably be an invalid for many years to come. Of course, I can't afford the round of nurses the doctor suggested, and knowing how good you were with your mother I

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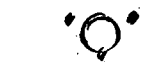
had an ambulance bring her home today. I put the house on South Street on the market. I guess we'll just have to put off our trip for a while. Come, dear, mother's waiting for us."

Dazed, Lucy followed him into the house.

"Lucy, Lucy," called the voice from the upstairs bedroom. "What on earth is taking you so long?"

Swaying Lucy grasped the newel post to keep from falling. She turned to Edward, who had already seated himself in the easy chair.

"We'll have to get Dr. Larson to prescribe some strong sleeping medicine," she said. "Coming, Mama!"



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If Mr. Robert L. Fish is not writing the best contemporary parody-pastiches of Sherlock Holmes, we'll eat Schlock Homes's deerstalker in front of 221B Bagel Street, with Dr. Watney's derby as dessert—so help us!

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ADAM BOMB

by ROBERT L. FISH

I HAD BEEN PURSUING AN ERRAND for my friend Mr. Schlock Homes in the small village of Elbow Twisting, Herts., when the fateful telegram arrived. I do not have it before me as I write, but it is not necessary, since its tragic message is engraved upon my memory. It read: "Mr. Homes passed away yesterday. Interment at four P.M. Portland Cemetery," and was signed by our housekeeper, Mrs. Essex. It was in complete shock that I threw my few possessions into my bag and caught the first train for London. There I transferred to a hansom and proceeded directly to the cemetery.

As we rattled through the dismal streets, I remembered that Homes had insisted upon doing research on a rare virus—so rare, he had informed me, that no known case of the disease had as yet been discovered. I had warned him of the dangers of such investigation, but he had passed it off with his usual disregard for either personal danger or the advice of others, and had now apparently fallen victim to the very germ he had been seeking. It was with heavy heart that I descended at the cemetery, barely able to think coherently.

There was a large group gathered about the open casket, and I forced myself to step forward for a last look at the frozen profile I had known so well. His brother Criscroft came forward and grasped my hand wordlessly. In silence I stepped back and observed the crowd about the grave. There I could see many police agents whom Homes had assisted in past cases, many persons of high estate who owed a great deal to my dead friend for their present state of well-being, and included in the crowd I could also see the smirking faces of many criminals to whose downfall Homes had been dedicated.

I could not help myself; tears formed in my eyes and fell unhindered to the ground. Feeling more alone than at any time of my life, I watched the undertaker's men bolt the cover into place and begin the sad task of lowering the casket into the waiting earth.

A sudden elbow in my ribs

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caused my attention to turn to a short, stocky figure at my side. He was a Cockney, poorly dressed, with a long scarf wrapped about his neck, and a huge straggling moustache covering half of his face.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish! Eh, wot, Guv'nor?" said this vile apparition in a high whining voice, once again nudging me with his sharp elbow.

"Hold your foul tongue and be off with you, you miserable specimen!" I cried, brandishing my stick. "No finer person ever breathed the clean, sweet air of Putney, and I shall tolerate no word against his memory! Be off, I say, or you shall suffer the worse for it!"

"My, my, Watney; such devotion would better to have been deserved," came the voice of my friend Schlock Homes with a chuckle. "No, do not look now, but meet me in fifteen minutes at the Uppin Arms in Jermyn Street!"

I could not help myself. I turned in astonishment, but the small figure had disappeared and I was left with my mind awhirl, watching the coffin being lowered into the cold grave.

I found my way to Jermyn Street after the funeral, but to this day I do not know how. It was difficult to believe that I had not been dreaming, for I had seen his body with my own eyes; yet the memory of that voice in my ear left me no choice.

Afraid of what I might find I pushed open the heavy door of the pub and entered into the gloom. The Cockney, still with scarf, but lacking his grotesque moustache, confronted me from a corner booth, and his twinkling eyes could belong to nobody in this world except my old friend Schlock Homes!

"Homes!" I cried, sinking into the seat opposite as my legs weakened beneath me. "How is it possible? What is the reason for this macabre joke? Why have you given this terrible shock to all your friends?"

"Only to you, I am afraid, Watney," replied Homes. "It was essential to a case that I am engaged upon that I vanish from sight, and since the time I disappeared in that tavern in Switzerland for several months, only a buried corpse could have satisfied my enemies. Both Criscroft and the police agents were aware of the scheme, and I believe I have made Mrs. Essex quite happy by allowing her to play a role in one of my cases. You, however, are too honest and open in your feelings, and any of our enemies, seeing your countenance, would have known at once that it was a trick. I am indeed sorry, Watney, for I know the shock you have suffered to-day, but believe me, it was of vital necessity!"

"And your sending me to Elbow Twisting?"

"A part of the same plan, I am afraid. I had planned to die of a

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virulent disease, and I was sure that I could scarcely hope to deceive you on that score!"

"But the body, Homes! I saw it myself!"

"An excellent example of Madame Tussaud's art, Watney. They have owed me a favour since the time I foiled those two miscreants who attempted to conceal themselves on the premises for the purpose of robbing the safe during the night. In fact, you yourself chronicled the case in The Adventure of the Waxed Pair."

"But your appearance, Homes! Your extra weight!"

"Only stuffing—actually, one of Mrs. Essex's pillows."

"And your height, Homes! You are fully a foot shorter!"

"Special shoes. But this complex procedure was not formulated either to demonstrate my ability at disguise or to needlessly cause you anguish, Watney. No; it was a necessity which, if you will allow me, I shall explain at once."

We ordered drinks, and once they were before us, Homes leaned back and proceeded to explain the events of the past few weeks.

"You are, of course, acquainted with my brother Criscroft," said he, "and you know of his important position in the Home Office. You must also be familiar with the high regard in which I hold him, not only for his intelligence, but also for his almost infallible sense of prescience.

"Well; some three weeks ago, while you were out on a call, Criscroft appeared in our rooms in Bagel Street. He had not sent any previous notice of his coming, which in itself was highly unusual, and he was not his usual calm self. He wandered about the room making small talk, as if reluctant to state the purpose of his visit. I waited patiently for him to approach the subject, but he continued with his evasions.

"'You were familiar with the Brace-Partridge plans?' he asked, obviously making conversation.

"'Certainly—a lovely couple,' I replied. 'Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the nuptials.'

"'But you sent a fish-slice?'

"'Of course. Halibut, I believe. However, I am sure that you did not remove yourself from your busy desk in Whitehall for the purpose of discussing London's social season with me. Pray tell me what is actually bothering you.'

"He threw himself into a chair and stared at me broodingly. 'If only I knew,' he replied. 'In truth I have nothing to go on but a feeling of foreboding, and I hate to interrupt your schedule with something which could well be only a wild-goose chase!'

"'Simply state the facts and let us proceed from there,' I said. 'You have never given me cause for complaint until now.'

"'Very well, then,' said he. 'The facts are these: quite recently a per-

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son giving his name as Frederic Adam appeared at the War Office and claimed to have invented a new type of infernal machine which he wished to patent under the name of the Adam Bomb. The War Office wanted more detailed information; he refused to disclose any of his secrets. They then offered him the use of the Sussex Proving Grounds for him to demonstrate his new invention, but he declined on the basis that the proving grounds were too small, and that the test would jeopardize nearby residents. Since the Sussex Proving Grounds are fully four acres in size, the War Office considered his excuse quite spurious, and sent him about his business.'

"'I should tend to agree with their action.'

"'I am not so sure. Well, a few days later a colleague of mine in the Explosives Section happened to mention the case to me in our club —not for action, but merely in idle conversation, as demonstrating the type of annoyance they suffered at the hands of cranks. For some reason a feeling of foreboding seemed to overcome me, and I pressed him for all details of the man and their conversations, but other than the facts which I have just stated, he was unable to be of further assistance.'

"'What did you do then?'

"'Actually, there was little that I could do officially. However, unofficially I began making inquiries into Mr. Frederic Adam's past, and while I could find nothing reprehensible in his activities, I did discover that while a student he had studied under Professor Marty, who is even today a brilliant scientist, as well as the most dangerous criminal in London, as we both know.'

"'Professor Marty, you say? You interest me deeply!'

"'I thought I would. Well; my investigation seemed to show that there had been no contact between them since Adam was graduated from the University, but this in itself means nothing. Adam, it appears, had private means, and established a laboratory near Glasgow, where he pursued his researches, and from whence he traveled when he first came to the War Office.'

"'And since that time?'

"'He has recently purchased an abandoned coal mine near Newcastle in Northumberland County, and is even now moving his scientific equipment into it. The mine is heavily guarded, extensively fenced, and quite impossible to enter. Other than his previous acquaintance with Professor Marty, and this feeling of foreboding which I cannot shake off, I admit I have small basis for further investigation; but I cannot rid myself of the conviction that it is vital we know what he is planning!'

"'And what do you wish me to do?'

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"'I suggest that you attempt to gain entrance to the mine in one of your inimitable disguises. Since I know that you are under constant surveillance by the criminal element of London, you must first convince them that you have taken sick and succumbed to your illness. You will then be free to pursue your investigation without undue suspicion on their part.'

"We therefore decided on the plan which you are now aware of. I am very sorry that it was necessary to include you among the victims of the deception, Watney, but the assurance of every scoundrel in England tonight—that Schlock Homes is safely disposed of beneath six feet of earth—owes much to your touching performance at the grave!"

"But Homes," I enquired, "is this not basically a matter for the police? Can they not demand entrance to this mine and see what deviltry is afoot?"

Homes smiled at me pityingly. "The police," said he, "may be able to locate something the size of an elephant—assuming the area of search were sufficiently proscribed. But in the first place, there is no evidence that Mr. Adam is engaged in anything nefarious, which would seriously complicate the possibility of obtaining searching warrants. In the second place, I doubt if the police would be in a position to recognize any clue should they encounter one. No, Criscroft is right. I shall have to go there myself and attempt to gain entrance to this mysterious mine in some fashion."

"And what is my role in all this?"

Homes leaned forward impressively. "This mine which Adam has purchased," said he, "is located at Seldom-on-Tyne, a suburb of Newcastle, in Northumberland County. We shall select a country inn on the river, sufficiently distant from the mine to avoid suspicion, but close enough to allow easy travel. There we shall share quarters, for I am certain to have errands for you to do. Besides, it is always well to have a friend in the vicinity when one is working underground!"

"And our luggage?"

"All has been arranged. Even now your baggage and mine are awaiting us at King's Cross. Our reservations on the sleeper are being held at the ticket-office. I suggest we dine at some small restaurant where my dishevelled appearance will not cause comment, and then, if you wish, we can pass the hours until train-time in shilling seats at Queen's Hall, where the Minsk dancers are performing."

"I should like that!" I cried with enthusiasm. "I have always wanted to see the Russian Minsk dancers!"

"Actually," said Homes, "I believe these are the Harold Minsk dancers from the United States."

"But Homes," I said in disap-

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pointment, "that is misrepresentation!"

"Yes," replied Homes thoughtfully. "I suppose you might call it a ballet ruse, but we do have the time to pass in some manner, and I understand that their talent is quite revealing."

The following morning I found myself ensconced in a fairly clean inn at Skeleton Quay, but a few miles from the heavily guarded mine. Homes had separated from me at the station, preferring to hire a ramshackle bicycle and pedalling off along the road ahead of my trap. I was amazed at his appearance: with his cap pushed back, his scarf waving in the breeze, his moustache rampant, and his shrill whistle, he appeared in all respects to be exactly what he pretended to be—a Tyne-side worker on his way to the job.

It was evening when he came whistling up the stairs to our room and entered the door. As soon as it was closed, he quickly locked it and fell into a chair laughing.

"There was little to it, Watney," he said. "I managed to combine the stupidity of a natural with the native cunning of the local folk, and this, plus my pure Geordie accent, did the job. They hired me at once! You are now looking at the new sweeper in the Adam mine."

"A sweeper?" I asked in amazement. "Certainly you could have obtained a better position."

"I am not there to make a living," he remarked drily, "and the sweeper, my dear Watney, is one person who has access to all parts of the installation. Also, in order not to interfere with the work, my duties require me to be in places when the other workers are having meals, which will allow me opportunities for observation which might otherwise be difficult.

"It is an interesting operation, and one which must have cost a pretty penny. Huge equipment is arriving constantly and being unpackaged. My duties take me to many parts of the mine, and I find it to be far more extensive than I should have imagined. I suggest, Watney, that tomorrow you take a trap into Newcastle and visit the local Coal Board for the purpose of obtaining a copy of the original survey of this mine. I am beginning to have a faint glimmer of the aim behind this tremendous imposture, and I shall need to be familiar with the terrain."

When Homes had left the following morning on his bicycle, I arranged transportation and went into Newcastle. While the Coal Board would not permit the original drawing to leave the premises, no objection was raised to my making a tracing of the underground map comprising the various tunnels of the old abandoned mine. With the tracing safely concealed on my person, I returned to Skeleton Quay, and spent the re-

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mainder of the day strolling along the river and admiring the fortitude of the brave people who could tolerate such a place.

The usual whistle announced the arrival of my friend, and once in the room I could tell from the excited gleam in his sharp eyes that he was on the trail of some interesting discovery.

"We are getting warmer, Watney!" he exclaimed. "You have the underground map?"

"A tracing of it," I replied. "The mine is indeed extensive. Some of the tunnels cover many miles."

"Fine! Please spread it out on this table and allow me to study it."

Taking a standard one-inch map from his jacket, he laid it side-by-side to my tracing, and began to pore over the two maps with great concentration. Finally he shoved them to one side and leaned back.

"I begin to see light, I believe, Watney. Let me tell you of an interesting discovery which I made to-day. During the lunch hour, it is my duty to clean the offices while the staff are eating, and I naturally took the opportunity to make a thorough search of the desks and drawers, as well as of the papers lying about. I found them to be covered with many scientific symbols, and I knew that if the solution to our problem lay in decoding all of these, our task would be a difficult one indeed! However, there was one formula which was recurrent, appearing at the head of each sheet of paper, and I memorized it, rather than take the chance of having it discovered during the nightly search to which all employees must submit on leaving the premises."

"And what is this formula, Homes?" I asked breathlessly.

He leaned over the table and scrawled on a sheet of paper. I stared at the figures in bewilderment, for he had written: $E = Mc^2$.

"You believe that this strange formula might throw light on our problem?" I asked in amazement. "But it is so short that it barely permits of decoding!"

"True; but still it is the only formula repeated on all the papers, and must therefore be vital to our case. As to its lack of length, I have solved shorter ones. I once located the body of a murdered man with nothing more to go on than the single letter X which appeared mysteriously on a newspaper diagram of the scene of the killing."

He rubbed his hands together nervously, in that gesture which I well knew indicated a desire to be alone with an interesting problem. "And now, if you will excuse me, Watney," he said, "I shall get right to it while the events are fresh in my mind, for I feel that I have all of the necessary facts within my possession!"

The following morning I awoke to find Homes pacing the floor in smiling satisfaction, and he chuck-

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led at my startled expression, for he was no longer in disguise.

"Yes, Watney," said he in high good humour, "the masquerade is over! The problem is solved! I am afraid that Mr. Adam will have to apply to the Labour Board for a new sweeper, although in truth I doubt if he will be in business long enough to require such services!"

"But Homes," I exclaimed in awe, "do you mean that with the little information which you showed me last night, you have managed to arrive at an answer to this mystery?"

"The importance of information is in direct relationship to our ability to interpret it," he replied. "Come to this table and allow me to show you the connection between the facts which we were able to collect."

Spreading the one-inch district map upon the table, he placed the mine tracing over it and carefully oriented the two until they were properly superimposed.

"I began my cogitation," he said, "by considering the possible reasons Mr. Adam might have had for locating his so-called scientific experiment in a mine. In the papers which I perused during my search of the office, I recalled reading something about a 'mushroom cloud,' and mines, of course, because of their dampness and constant temperature, are ideal for the cultivation of mushrooms; but since I was, and am, convinced that these papers were spurious in intent, I disregarded this line of thought.

"I then considered what more logical reason he might have for this odd selection of location. Suddenly a possibility struck me! Mine tunnels, Watney, run for many miles underground, and are a perfect means of getting from one place to another without detection! I immediately began to follow the various tunnels, comparing their location with the surface objects under which they passed. And then I had it!"

He placed a long, tapering finger directly on one spot of the superimposed maps and continued, "Here, Watney, is the answer! Tunnel Number Five runs in a northerly direction, passing beneath nothing more important than farm country and several small villages, until it reaches here, at which point, if you will note, it stops *directly beneath Eastland Prison!*

"It was now quite obvious that the E of the formula stood for *Eastland,* and I therefore returned with even greater concentration to the study of the remainder of these mysterious symbols: $= Mc^2$. I attempted to rationalize the M for eight miles or meters, or the c for cubits or cells, but the answer refused to manifest itself. It was only after many hours of pondering that I realized that I was being unnecessarily complex in my reasoning.

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The equal sign clearly indicated that the formula was mathematical in nature, and I therefore attempted to solve it from a mathematical approach. And then I finally saw it! Do you recall what the small 2 above the c stands for in mathematics, Watney?"

"The square, does it not?" I answered.

"It does indeed, but is it not also called the *power?"*

Suddenly I saw the answer. "McPowers!" I cried. "Angus McPowers, the Glasgow assassin!"

"Precisely! The man known in thieves argot in Glasgow as the Scotch cooler! His execution at Eastland Prison is scheduled for next week and his friends and criminal associates have sworn they would arrange his escape at all costs! In the mine, Watney, I also discovered a large machine marked 'Cyclatron' which can only be an electrically operated cycle of some new scientific design intended to spirit him beyond our reach once they have tunneled him to freedom! But I am afraid that they did not plan on the interference of Schlock Homes when they planned this ingenious escape!"

"A brilliant tour de force, Homes!" I exclaimed, grasping his hand. "What do you plan to do now?"

"It is already done, Watney. Early this morning I entered the mine in my sweeper's disguise and reversed the electrical connections on their high-powered cycle. Then, upon my return here, I sent telegrams to both Criscroft and Scotland Yard advising them of the situation. Even now the watch on McPowers is being doubled, and the Adam gang are under twenty-four hour surveillance. McPowers will go to his Maker as the judge ordered—that I promise!"

The following morning, back once again in our quarters in 221B Bagel Street, Homes entered the breakfast room just as I was finishing my perusal of the daily journal.

"Is there anything of interest in the paper this morning?" he enquired genially, sitting down to his breakfast and drawing a napkin into his lap.

"A rather curious disappearance in the north," I replied, reading further into the article.

Homes sat back in alarm. "Do not tell me that despite all my efforts, the police have allowed McPowers to disappear!" he cried.

"Not exactly," I said, handing him the journal. "It seems that sometime during the night the whole of Northumberland County disappeared."

"Northumberland County, eh?" said Homes, relaxing and accepting the journal. "Well; we should not have to become involved—for this, at least, if of sufficient size for even the police to track down!"

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THE CASE AGAINST CARROLL

by ELLERY QUEEN

(continued from page 36)

That was a bad time for John Carroll. Ellery and West had to do some hard and fast talking to keep him from going to pieces altogether. They talked and talked through the brightening gloom and the tinny sounds of the prison coming to life.

"Hopeless. It's hopeless," Carroll kept muttering.

"No," Ellery said. "It only looks hopeless, Carroll. The Fancy Dan who weaves an elaborate shroud for somebody else more often than not winds up occupying it himself. The clever boys trip over their own cleverness. There's a complex pattern here, and it's getting more tangled by the hour. That's good, Carroll. It's not hopeless at all."

But Carroll only shook his head.

West was circling the cell like a frustrated hawk. "On the other hand, Queen, let's face the facts. John has lost his alibi—the only thing that could surely save him."

"Only temporarily."

"We've got to get that alibi back!"

"We will. Stop running around in circles, West. You're making me nervous. The obvious step is to find that woman."

West looked helpless. "But where do I start? Will you help, Queen?"

Ellery grinned. "I've been hoping you'd ask me that. If Carroll's agreeable, I'd be glad to. Want me to help, Carroll?"

The man on the bunk roused himself. "Want you? I'd take the devil himself! The question is, What can you do?"

"This and that. Here, have a smoke." Ellery jabbed a cigarette between Carroll's swollen lips. "West, you look beat. How about going home and catching some sleep? Oh, and give my father a ring, will you? Tell him about this Felicia Hunt development and ask him for me to hop right on it."

When West had gone, Ellery seated himself on the bunk. For a moment he watched Carroll smoke. Then he said, "Carroll."

"What?"

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself and listen to me. First, let's try to track down that business of the missing alibi statement. Go back to the time when you approached Felicia to sign it. Where did the meeting take place? When? Give me every fact you can remember, and then dig for some you've forgotten."

He listened closely. When Carroll was finished, Ellery nodded.

"It's about as I figured. After Mrs. Hunt signed the statement and Gunder notarized her signature and went away, you left with

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the envelope in your brief case and instead of going home you returned to your office. You never once, you say, let go of the brief case. In the office you placed the envelope in your safe without checking its contents, locked the safe, and adjusted the dial to a new combination word. And on the three or four subsequent occasions when you checked on the envelope, you claim nobody could have removed the statement from it while you had the safe open, or discovered the new combinations you kept setting.

"When the envelope finally was taken from the safe, the only hands not your own to touch it were mine, last night. And I'll vouch for the fact that the statement couldn't have been stolen from me or lost from the envelope on the way over here." Ellery tapped the manila envelope still in Carroll's hand. "So this was empty when I took it from the safe. Carroll, it's been empty for months. It was empty before you ever put it in the safe."

Carroll looked at it, dazed.

"Only one conclusion possible." Ellery lit another cigarette for him, and one for himself. "The only time the envelope was not actually in your physical possession, or in the safe, or in my hands, was for a couple of minutes in the Hunt house the night Felicia signed the statement. You say that after she signed and Gunder notarized her signature, you slipped the statement into the envelope and the envelope into your brief case, that you then took Gunder downstairs to pay him off and see him out. During that couple of minutes the brief case with its contents were out of your sight and control. Therefore that's when the great disappearance took place. And since Mrs. Hunt was the only one in the room with the brief case . . ."

"Felicia?"

"Nobody else. Why should she have taken the statement she had just signed, Carroll? Any idea?"

"She double-crossed me, damn her," Carroll said in a thick voice. "And now she's ducked out to avoid having to tell the story under oath."

"We'll get her to duck right back in if we have to extradite her from Little America." Ellery rose and squeezed Carroll's shoulder. "Hang on, Johnny."

Felicia Hunt's whereabouts remained a mystery for as long as it took Ellery to go from the Tombs to Police Headquarters. His father had just come into the office and he was elbow-deep in reports.

"Yes, West phoned me," the Inspector said, without looking up. "If he'd hung on, I'd have been able to tell him in three minutes where Felicia Hunt is. Blast it all, where's that Grierson affidavit!"

Ellery waited patiently.

"Well?" he said at last. "I'm still hanging."

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"What? Oh!" Inspector Queen leaned back. "All I did was phone Smallhauser at the D.A.'s office. It seems a couple of days before Carroll's trial started—last Saturday morning—Hunt's widow showed up at the D.A.'s all tricked out in that ghastly mourning she wears, with her doctor in tow. The doctor told Smallhauser Mrs. Hunt was in a dangerously nervous state and couldn't face the ordeal of the trial. He wanted her to get away from the city. Seems she'd bought a cottage up in northern Westchester this summer and a few days up there by herself were just what the M.D. ordered, and was it all right with the D.A.? Well, Smallhauser didn't like it, but he figured that with the cottage having a phone he could always get her back to town in a couple of hours. So he said okay, and she gave her maid a week off and went up there Saturday afternoon. What's the hassle?"

Ellery told him. His father listened suspiciously.

"So that's what West was being so mysterious about," he exclaimed. "An alibi! The D.A.'s going to love this."

"So will Rayfield. He doesn't know about it yet, either."

The Inspector cocked a sharpening eye. "What's your stake in this pot?"

"The right," Ellery said piously. "And seeing that it prevails."

His father grunted and reached for the telephone. When he set it down, he had a Mt. Kisco number scribbled on his pad.

"Here, you call her," he said. "I'm working the other side of the street. And don't use a city phone for a toll call! You know where to find a booth."

Ellery was back in front of his father's desk in forty-five minutes.

"What now?" Inspector Queen said. "I was just on my way to the Bullpen."

"She doesn't answer."

"Who doesn't answer?"

"The Hunt lady," Ellery said. "Remember the case? I've phoned at five-minute intervals for almost an hour. Either she's gone into an early hibernation, or she's back in Central America charming the hidalgos."

"Or she just isn't answering her phone. Look, son, I'm up to my lowers this morning. The case is out of my hands, anyway. Keep calling. She'll answer sooner or later."

Ellery tried all day, slipping in and out of the courtroom every half hour. At a little past three the Assistant District Attorney rested his case, and on the request of the defense, Judge Joseph H. Holloway adjourned the trial until the next morning.

Ellery managed to be looking elsewhere when John Carroll was taken from the courtroom. Carroll walked as if his knees were giving way. But as the room cleared, Ellery caught Tully West's eye. West,

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who was stooping over Helena Carroll in distress, nodded and after a moment came over.

"What about Felicia? She'll testify, won't she?" West sounded urgent.

Ellery glanced over at the reporters surrounding the portly figure of Rayfield. Some were glancing back, noses in the wind.

"We can't talk here, West. Can you get away?"

"I'll have to take Helena home first." West was braced, like a man set for a blow. "Where?"

"My father's office as soon as you can make it."

"What about Rayfield?"

"Better not say anything to him those newsmen can overhear. We can get in touch with him tonight."

It was nearly five o'clock before the tall lawyer hurried into the Inspector's office. He looked haunted.

"Sorry, Helena went to pieces on me. I had to tell her all about John's alibi. Now she's more confused than ever. Damn it, why didn't John trust her in the first place?" West wiped his face. He said slowly, "And now I suppose you'll tell me Felicia refuses to cooperate."

"I almost wish that were it." Ellery was looking haggard himself. "West, I've been phoning since eight-thirty this morning. I tried again only ten minutes ago. She doesn't answer."

"She isn't there?"

"Maybe." Inspector Queen was looking annoyed. "Ellery, why the devil won't you ask the help of the state police? We could have a report on her in an hour."

"No." Ellery got up. "West, do you have your car?"

"I cabbed down."

Ellery glanced at his father. The old man threw up his hands and stamped out.

"I ought to have my head examined! Velie, get me a car."

They drove out of the city on Saw Mill River Parkway, Sergeant Velie at the wheel and Inspector Queen beside him nursing his grouch. Behind them, from opposite windows, Ellery and West studied the scenery. They were studying it long after darkness fell.

The sergeant turned the unmarked squad car off the Parkway near Mt. Kisco.

"Pull up at that gas station." They were the first words the Inspector had uttered since leaving the city.

"Stony Ride Road?" the attendant said. "That's up between here and Bedford Hills. Dirt road that goes way off to hell and gone. Who you looking for?"

"The Hunt place."

"Hunt? Never heard."

Ellery stuck his head out. "How about Santos?"

"Santos. Yeah, dame of that name bought the old Meeker place this summer. You follow along here about a mile and a half . . ."

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"Using her maiden name," West said as they drove away. "Meredith would have loved that."

The Queens said nothing.

Stony Ride Road climbed and twisted and swooped back, jolting their teeth. The darkness was impressive. They saw only two houses in three miles. A mile beyond the second, they found Felicia Hunt's cottage. Sergeant Velie very nearly drove past it. Its windows were as black as the night itself.

Velie swung the car between two mossy pillars into a crushed-stone driveway.

"No, Velie, stop here and shine your brights dead on the house." The Inspector sounded troubled.

"She's gone," West growled. "She's gone or she never came here at all! What am I going to tell John?"

Ellery borrowed the sergeant's flash and got out. The Inspector put his small hand on Tully West's arm.

"No, Mr. West, we'll wait here." Trouble was in his look, too.

It was a verdigrised fieldstone cottage with rusty wood trim and a darkly shingled roof, cuddled against wild woods. Ellery played his flash on the door. They saw him extend his foot and toe the door, and they saw it swing back.

He went into the house, flash first. A moment later the hall lit up.

He was in the house exactly two minutes.

At the sight of his face Inspector Queen and Sergeant Velie jumped from the car and ran past him and into the cottage.

Ellery said, "You can tell John to forget his alibi, West. She's in there—dead."

Felicia Hunt was lying on the bedroom floor face down, which was unfortunate. The back of her head had been crushed, and the bloody shards of the heavy stoneware vase that had crushed it strewed the floor around her. In the debris were some stiff chrysanthemums, looking like big dead insects. One of them had fallen on her open right palm.

West swallowed and retreated rapidly to the hall.

She had been dressed in a rainbow-striped frock of some iridescent material when death caught her. Jewels glittered on her hands and arms and neck. There were pomponned scuffs on her feet, her legs were bare, and the dead lips and cheeks and eyes showed no trace of make-up.

"She's been dead at least four days, maybe five," Inspector Queen said. "What do you make it, Velie?"

"Nearer four," the big sergeant said. "Last Sunday some time, I'd say, Inspector." He glanced with longing at the tightly closed windows.

"Better not, Velie."

The two men rose. They had touched nothing but the body, and that with profound care.

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Ellery stood watching them morosely.

"Find anything, son?"

"No. That rain the other night wiped out any tire tracks or footprints that might have been left. Some spoiling food in the refrigerator, and her car is in the garage behind the house. No sign of robbery." Ellery added suddenly, "Doesn't something about her strike you as queer?"

"Yeah," Sergeant Velie said. "That posy in her hand ought to be a lily."

"Spare us, Velie! What, Ellery?"

"The way she's dressed."

They stared down at her. Tully West came back to the doorway, still swallowing.

The sergeant said, "Looks like she was expecting somebody, the way she's all dolled up."

"That's just what it doesn't look like," Inspector Queen snapped. "A woman as formally brought up as this one, who's expecting somebody, puts on shoes and stockings, Velie—doesn't go around barelegged and wearing bedroom slippers. She hadn't even made up her face or polished her nails. She was expecting nobody. What about the way she's dressed, Ellery?"

"Why isn't she still in mourning?"

"Huh?"

"She drives up here alone Saturday after wearing nothing but unrelieved black in town, and within twenty-four hours or less she's in a color-happy dress, back wearing her favorite jewelry, and having a ball for herself. It tells a great deal about Felicia de los Santos Hunt."

"It doesn't tell me a thing," his father retorted. "What I want to know is why she was knocked off. It wasn't robbery. And there's nothing to indicate rape, although it's true a would-be rapist might have panicked—"

"Isn't it obvious that this is part and parcel of Hunt's murder and the frame-up of John Carroll?" West broke in with bitterness. "Rape! Felicia was murdered to keep her from giving John the alibi that would get him off the hook."

The Inspector nibbled his mustache.

"What does it take to convince you people that somebody is after Carroll's hide!"

"That sounds like sense, Dad."

"Maybe."

"At the least, the Hunt woman's murder is bound to give the case against Carroll a different look.—Dad, before Velie phones the state police."

"Well?"

"Let's you and Velie and I really give this place a going over."

"What for, Ellery?"

"For that alibi statement Felicia signed and then took back when Carroll wasn't looking. It's a long shot, but . . . who knows?"

Their session with the state police took the rest of the night. It

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was sunrise before they got back to the city.

West asked to be dropped off at Beekman Place.

"Sam Rayfield won't thank me for waking him up, but then I haven't had any sleep at all. Who's going to tell John?"

"I will," Ellery said.

West turned away with a grateful wave.

"So far so bad," the Inspector said as they sped downtown. "Now all I have to do is talk the D.A.'s office into joining Rayfield in a plea to Judge Holloway, and why *I* should have to do it is beyond me!"

"You going home, Inspector?"

"Sure I'm going home, Velie! I can take Smallhauser's abuse over my own phone as well as at Headquarters. And maybe get some sleep, too. How about you, son?"

"The Tombs," Ellery said.

He parted with Sergeant Velie at the Headquarters garage and walked over to the Criminal Courts Building. His head was muddy, and he wanted to cleanse it. He tried not to think of John Carroll.

Carroll woke up instantly at the sound of the cell door.

"Queen! How did you make out with Felicia?"

Ellery said, "We didn't."

"She won't testify?"

"She can't testify. John, she's dead."

It was brutal, but he knew no kinder formula. Carroll was half sitting up, leaning on an elbow, and he remained that way. His eyes kept blinking in a monotonous rhythm.

"Dead . . ."

"Murdered. We found her on the bedroom floor of her cottage with her head smashed in. She'd been dead for days."

"Murdered." Carroll blinked and blinked. "But who—?"

"There's not a clue. So far, anyway." Ellery lit a cigarette and held it out. Carroll took it. But then he dropped it and covered his face with both hands. "I'm sorry, John," Ellery said.

Carroll's hands came down. He had his lower lip in his teeth.

"I'm no coward, Queen. I faced death a hundred times in the Pacific and didn't chicken out. But a man likes to die for some purpose . . . I'm scared."

Ellery looked away.

"There's got to be some way out of this!" Carroll dropped off the bunk and ran in his bare feet to the bars of the cell, to grasp them with both hands. But then he whirled and sprang at Ellery, seizing him by the arms. "That statement—that's my out, Queen! Maybe she didn't destroy it. Maybe she took it up there with her. If you can find it for me—"

"I've looked," Ellery said gently. "And my father looked, and Sergeant Velie, too. We covered the cottage inside and out. It took us

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over two hours. We didn't call the local police until we were satisfied it wasn't there."

"But it's got to be there! My life depends on it! Don't you see?" He shook Ellery.

"Yes, John."

"You missed it. Maybe she put it in an obvious place, like in that story of Poe's. Did you look in her purse? Her luggage?"

"Yes, John."

"Her suits—coats—the linings—"

"Yes, John."

"Her car—?"

"And her car."

"Then maybe it was on her," Carroll said feverishly. "On her person. Did you . . . ? No, I suppose you wouldn't."

"We would and we did." Ellery's arms ached. He wished Carroll would let go.

"How about that big ruby-and-emerald locket she was so hipped on? The alibi statement was only a single sheet of paper. She might have wadded it up and hidden it in the locket. Did you look there while you were searching the body?"

"Yes, John. All we found in the locket were two photos, Spanish-looking elderly people. Her parents, I suppose."

Carroll released him. Ellery rubbed his arms.

"How about books?" Carroll mumbled. "Felicia was always reading some trashy novel or other. She might have slipped it between two pages—"

"There were eleven books in the house, seven magazines. I went through them myself."

In the cold cell Carroll wiped the perspiration from his cheeks.

"Desk with a false compartment? . . . Cellar? . . . Is there an attic? . . . Did you search the garage?"

He went on and on. Ellery waited for him to run down.

When Carroll was finally quiet, Ellery called the guard. His last glimpse of the young lawyer was of a spreadeagled figure, motionless on the bunk, eyes shut. All Ellery could think of was a corpse.

Judge Joseph H. Holloway shook his head. He was a gray-skinned, frozen-eyed old-timer of the criminal courts, known to practising members of the New York bar as Old Steelguts.

"I didn't come down to my chambers an hour early on a Monday morning, Counselor Rayfield, for the pleasure of listening to your mellifluous voice. That pleasure palled on me a long time ago. I granted an adjournment Friday morning because of the Hunt woman's murder, but do you have any evidence to warrant a further postponement? So far I've heard nothing but a lot of booshwah."

Assistant District Attorney Smallhauser nodded admiringly. Judge Holloway's fondness for the slang of his youth—indulged in only *in camera,* of course—was trifled with at the peril of the trifler.

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"Booshwah is *le mot juste* for it, Your Honor. I apologize for being a party to this frivolous waste of your time."

Samuel Rayfield favored the murderous little Assistant D.A. with a head-shrinking glance and clamped his teeth more firmly about his cold cigar. "Come off it, Joe," he said to Judge Holloway. "This is a man's life we're playing with. We're not privileged to kick him to death simply because he acted like a damn fool in holding back his alibi. All I want this adjournment for is time to look for that alibi statement the Hunt woman signed when she was alive enough to write."

Judge Holloway's dentures gleamed toward Smallhauser.

"The alibi statement your client *says* the Hunt woman signed," the little D.A. said with his prim smile.

The Judge's dentures promptly turned to Rayfield.

"I've got the notary, Gunder, to attest to the fact that she signed it," the portly lawyer snapped.

"That she signed some paper, yes. But you people admit yourselves that Carroll concealed the text of the paper from Gunder. For all Gunder knows he might have been notarizing the woman's signature to the lease of a new dog house." The little D.A. turned his smile on the Judge. "I'm bound to say, Your Honor, this whole thing smells more and more to me like a stall."

"Come around some time when you've put on long pants and I'll show you what a real stall smells like, Smallhauser!" the famous lawyer said. "Joe, I'm not stalling. There's a chance she didn't destroy the statement. Not much of one, I admit, but I wouldn't sleep nights if I thought I hadn't exhausted every avenue of investigation in Carroll's behalf."

"You wouldn't lose half of a strangled snore," the Judge said with enjoyment. "Look, Sam, it's all conjecture, and you know it. You can't even show that Mrs. Hunt stole that alleged statement of hers from Carroll in the first place."

"Ellery Queen showed—"

"I know what Ellery Queen showed. He showed his usual talent for making something out of nothing. Ellery's idea of proof!" The old jurist snorted. "And even if the Hunt woman did steal an alibi statement from Carroll, what did she steal it for if not to burn it or flush it down a toilet? And even if she held on to it, where is it? The Queens didn't find it in her Westchester cottage. You yourself ransacked her New York house over the week-end. You got a court order to examine her safe deposit box. You questioned her maid and the people in Carroll's office and God knows who else—all without result. Be reasonable, Sam! That alibi statement either never existed or, if it did, it doesn't exist any more. I can't predicate a postponement on the defendant's unsupported alle-

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gation of alibi. You know I can't."

"Of course, if you'd like to put Carroll on the stand," Smallhauser said with a grin, "so I can cross-examine him—"

Rayfield ignored him. "All right, Joe. But you can't deny that Hunt's wife has also been murdered. That's a fact, and in evidence of it we can produce a corpse. And I don't believe in coincidences. When a man's murder is followed by his wife's murder, I say the two are connected. The connection in this case is obvious. The murder of Felicia Hunt was committed in order to blow up Carroll's alibi for the murder of Meredith Hunt and to cement Carroll's conviction. How can his trial proceed with this area unexplained? I tell you, Joe, this man is being framed by somebody who's committed two murders in order to pull the frame off! Give us time to explore."

"I remember once sitting here listening to Ellery Queen," Judge Holloway said grimly. "You're beginning to sound like his echo. Sam, evidence is what trials are ruled by, and evidence is what you ain't got. Motion denied. My courtroom, gentlemen, ten o'clock on the nose."

Ellery got the answer that Thursday afternoon in the half-empty courtroom while the jury was out deliberating John Carroll's fate.

It came to him after an agonizing reappraisal of the facts as he knew them. He had gone over them countless times before. This time—in the lighting flash he had begun to think would never strike again—he saw it.

By good luck, at the time it came, he was alone. Carroll had been taken back to the Tombs, and his wife and the two lawyers had gone with him so that he would not have to sweat the waiting out alone.

A sickish feeling invaded Ellery's stomach. He got up and went out and found the nearest men's room.

When he returned to the courtroom, Tully West was waiting for him.

"Helena wants to talk to you." West's face was green, too.

"No."

"I beg your pardon?"

Ellery shook his head clear. "I mean—yes, of course."

West misunderstood. "I don't blame you. I wish I were anywhere else myself. Rayfield was smart—he bowed out for 'coffee'."

Carroll was being held in a detention room under guard. Ellery was surprised at his calm, even gentle, look. It was Helena Carroll's eyes that were wild. He was holding her hands, trying to console her.

"Honey, honey, it's going to come out all right. They won't convict an innocent man."

"Why are they taking so *long*? They've been out five hours!"

"That's a good sign, Helena," West said. "The longer they take,

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the better John's chances are."

She saw Ellery then, and she struggled to her feet and was at him so swiftly that he almost stepped back.

"I thought you were supposed to be so marvelous at these things! You haven't done anything for John—anything."

Carroll tried to draw her back, but she shook him off. Her pain-etched face was livid.

"I don't care, John! You should have hired a real detective while there was still time. I wanted you to—I *begged* you and Tully not to rely on somebody so close to the police!"

"Helena, really." West was embarrassed.

Ellery said stonily, "No, Mrs. Carroll is quite right. I wish I had never got mixed up in it."

She was staring at him intently. "That almost sounds as if . . ."

"As if what, Helena?" West was trying to humor her, get her away.

"As if he knows. *Tully, he does.* Look at his face!" She clawed at Ellery. "You know, and you won't say anything! You talk, do you hear? Tell me! *Who's behind this?"*

West was flabbergasted. With surprise John Carroll studied Ellery's face for a moment, then he went to the barred window and stood there rigidly.

"Who?" His wife was weeping now. *"Who?"*

But Ellery was as rigid as Carroll. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Carroll. I can't save your husband. It's too late."

"Too late," she said hysterically. "How can you say it's too late when—"

"Helena." West took the little woman by the arms and forcibly sat her down. Then he turned to Ellery, his lean face dark. "What's this all about, Queen? You sound as if you're covering up for someone. Are you?"

Ellery glanced past the angry lawyer to the motionless man at the window.

"I'll leave it up to John," he said. "Shall I answer him, John?"

For a moment it seemed as if Carroll had not heard. But then he turned, and there was something about him—a dignity, a finality—that quieted Tully West and Helen Carroll and sent their glances seeking each other.

Carroll replied clearly, *"No."*

Looking out over the prison yard from the Warden's office, Ellery thought he had never seen a lovelier spring night sky, or a sadder one. A man should die on a stormy night, with all Nature protesting. This, he thought, this is cruel and unusual punishment.

He sought the Warden's clock. Carroll had fourteen minutes of life left.

The Warden's door opened and closed behind him. Ellery did not turn around. He thought he knew who it was. He had been half expecting his father for an hour.

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"Ellery. I looked for you at the Death House."

"I was down there before, Dad. Had a long talk with Carroll. I thought you'd be here long ago."

"I wasn't intending to come at all. It isn't my business. I did my part of it. Or maybe that's why I'm here. After a lifetime of this sort of thing, I'm still not hardened to it . . . Ellery."

"Yes, Dad."

"It's Helena Carroll. She's hounded and haunted me. She's waiting in an Ossining bar right now with West. I drove them up. Mrs. Carroll thinks I have some drag with you. Do I?"

Ellery said from the window, "In practically everything, Dad. But not in this."

"I don't understand you," the Inspector said heavily. "If you have information that would save Carroll, how can you keep buttoned up now?—here? All right, you saw something we didn't. Is it my job you're worried about, because I helped put Carroll on this spot? If you know something that proves his innocence, the hell with me."

"I'm not thinking of you."

"Then you can only be thinking of Carroll. He's protecting somebody, he's willing to go to the Chair for it, and you're helping him do it. Ellery, you can't do that." The old man clutched his arm. "There's still a few minutes. The Warden's got an open line to the Governor's office."

But Ellery shook his head.

Inspector Queen stared at his son's set profile for a moment. Then he went over to a chair and sat down, and father and son waited.

At 11:04 the lights suddenly dimmed.

Both men stiffened.

The office brightened.

At 11:07 it happened again.

And again at 11:12.

After that there was no change. Ellery turned away from the window, fumbling for his cigarettes.

"Do you have a light, Dad?"

The old man struck a match for him. Ellery nodded and sat down beside him.

"Who's going to tell her?" his father said suddenly.

"You are," Ellery said. "I can't."

Inspector Queen rose. "Live and learn," he said.

"Dad—"

The opening of the door interrupted them. Ellery got to his feet. The Warden's face was as haggard as theirs. He was wiping it with a damp handkerchief.

"I never get used to it," he said, "never . . . He went very peacefully. No trouble at all."

Ellery said, "Yes, he would."

"He gave me a message for you, by the way."

"Thanking him, I suppose," Inspector Queen said bitterly.

"Why, yes, Inspector," the War-

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den said. "He said to tell your son how grateful he was. What on earth did he mean?"

"Don't ask *him*," the Inspector said. "My son's constituted himself a one-man subcommittee of the Almighty. Where you going to wait for me, Ellery?" he demanded as they left the Warden's office. "I mean while I do the dirty work?"

Ellery said stiffly, "Take Helena Carroll and Tully West back to the city first."

"Just tell me one thing. What was Carroll 'grateful' to you for? Who'd you help him cover up?"

Ellery shook his head. "I'll see you at home afterward."

"Well?" the old man said. He had got into his frayed bathrobe and slippers, and he was nursing a cup of stale coffee with his puffy hands. He looked exhausted. "And it had better be good."

"Oh, it's good," Ellery said. "If good is the word." He had not undressed, had not even removed his topcoat. He sat there as he had come in from the long drive to wait for his father. He stared at the blank Queen wall. "It was a slip of the tongue. I remembered it. After a long time of not remembering, I remembered it. It wouldn't have made any difference if the slip had never been made, or if I'd forgotten it altogether. Any difference to Carroll, I mean. He was sunk from the start. I couldn't save him, Dad, He'd had it."

"What slip?" the old man demanded. "Of whose tongue? Or was I deaf as well as blind?"

"I was the only one who heard it. It had to do with Felicia Hunt. Her husband dies and she goes into Spanish mourning, total and unadorned. But when she gets off by herself in that hillside cottage, back on go the gay clothes, her favorite jewelry. By herself, mind you—alone. Safe from all eyes, even her maid's."

Ellery stared harder at the blank wall. "When we got back to town after finding her body, I went directly to the Tombs to tell Carroll about the murder in Westchester of the only human being who could give him an alibi. Carroll was frantic. His mind went back to the alibi statement she had signed and then taken from his brief case unknown to him at the time. It was all he could think of, naturally. If that piece of paper existed, if she had hidden it instead of destroying it, he could still be saved. He kept pounding at me. Maybe she'd hidden it in her luggage, her car, a secret drawer. He went on and on. And one of the places he mentioned as a possible hiding place of the statement was the locket of the ruby-and-emerald pendant Felicia Hunt was so fond of. 'Did you look there?' he asked me. *'While you were searching the body?'"*

Ellery flung aside a cigarette he had never lit. "That question of his was what I finally remembered."

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"He knew she was wearing the pendant . . ."

"Exactly, when no one could have have known except ourselves when we found her—and the one who had murdered her there five days earlier."

He sank deeper into his coat. "It was a blow, but there it was—John Carroll had murdered Felicia Hunt. He'd had the opportunity, of course. You and Velie agreed that the latest she could have been murdered was the preceding Sunday. And on that Sunday Carroll was still free on bail. It wasn't until the next morning, Monday, that he had to resubmit to the custody of the court for the commencement of his trial."

"But it doesn't add up," Inspector Queen spluttered. "The Hunt woman's testimony would get him an acquittal. Why should Carroll have knocked off the only witness who could give him his alibi?"

"Just what I asked myself. And the only answer that made sense was: Carroll must have had reason to believe that when Felicia took the stand in court, she was going to tell the truth."

"Truth? The truth about what?"

"About Carroll's alibi being false."

"False?"

"Yes. And from his standpoint, of course, that would compel him to kill her. To protect the alibi."

"But without her he had no alibi, true *or* false!"

"Correct," Ellery said softly, *"but when Carroll drove up to Westchester he didn't know that.* At that time he thought he had her signed statement locked in his office safe. He didn't learn until days after he had killed her—when West and I opened the safe and found the envelope empty—that he no longer had possession of the alibi statement, hadn't had possession for months, in fact—that, as I pointed out to him, Felicia Hunt must have taken it from his brief case while he was downstairs showing the notary out. No wonder he almost collapsed."

"I'll be damned," the Inspector said. "I'll be double-damned."

Ellery shrugged. "If Carroll's alibi for Meredith Hunt's murder was a phony, then the case against him stood as charged. The alibi was the only thing that gave him the appearance of innocence. If in fact he had no alibi, everything pointed to his guilt of Hunt's murder, as the jury rightfully decided.

"Carroll filled in the details for me earlier tonight in the Death House." Ellery's glance went back to the wall. "He said that when he left his house that rainy night after Hunt's ultimatum, to walk off his anger, the fog gave him a slight lease on hope. Maybe Hunt's plane was grounded and Hunt was still within reach. He phoned La Guardia and found that all flights had been delayed for a few hours. On the chance that Hunt was hanging around the airport, Carroll stopped

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in at his office and got his target pistol. He had some vague idea, he said, of threatening Hunt into a change of heart.

"He took a cab to La Guardia, found Hunt waiting for the fog to clear, and persuaded him to get his car from the parking lot so that they could talk in privacy. Eventually Hunt meandered back to Manhattan and parked on East 58th Street. The talk in the car became a violent quarrel. Carroll's hair-trigger temper went off, and he shot Hunt. He left Hunt in the Thunderbird and stumbled back home in the rain.

"The next morning, when we called on Mrs. Hunt to announce her husband's killing and found Carroll and West there, and you mentioned that the killer had left his gun in Hunt's car, Carroll was sick. Remember he ran into the bathroom? He wasn't acting that time. For the first time he realized that, in his fury and panic, he'd completely forgotten about the gun.

"As a lawyer," Ellery went on, "he knew what a powerful circumstantial case loomed against him, and that the only thing that could save him was an equally powerful alibi. He saw only one possible way to get it. He had never destroyed the love letters Felicia Hunt had written him during her infatuation. And he knew her dread of scandal. So he fabricated a statement out of the whole cloth about having spent the murder period in her bedroom 'pleading' with her to intercede with her husband, and he took the statement to her. He didn't have to spell out his threat. Felicia understood clearly enough the implication of his proposal . . . that if she didn't give him the phony alibi he needed, he would publish her love letters and ruin her with her strait-laced Latin-American family and compatriots. She signed."

"But why didn't Carroll produce the alibi right away, Ellery? What was his point in holding it back?"

The legal mind again. If he produced it during the investigation, even if it served to clear him, the case would still be open on the books and later he might find himself back in it up to his ears. But if he stood trial for Hunt's murder and *then* produced the fake alibi and was acquitted—he was safe from the law forever by the rule of double jeopardy. He couldn't be tried again for Hunt's killing after that even if the alibi should at some future date be exposed as a fake.

"He knew from the beginning," Ellery continued, "that Felicia Hunt was the weak spot in his plan. She was neurotic and he was terribly afraid she might wilt under pressure when he needed her most. As the trial approached, Carroll told me, he got more and more nervous about her. So the day before it was scheduled to start, he decided to talk to her again. Learning that she'd gone into retreat up in Westchester, he found an excuse

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to get away from his family and drove up to the cottage. His worst fears were realized. She told him that she had changed her mind. Scandal or no scandal, she wasn't going to testify falsely under oath and lay herself open to perjury. What she didn't tell him—it might possibly have saved her life if she had—was that she'd stolen and destroyed the alibi statement he had forced her to sign months before.

"Carroll grabbed the nearest heavy object and hit her over the head with it. Now at least, he consoled himself, she wouldn't be able to repudiate her signed statement, which he thought was in his office safe."

"And you've kept all this to yourself," his father muttered. "Why, Ellery? You certainly didn't owe Carroll anything."

Ellery turned from the wall. He looked desperately tired.

"No, I didn't owe Carroll anything . . . a man with a completely cockeyed moral sense . . . too proud to live on his wife's money, yet capable of stealing twenty thousand dollars . . . a faithful husband who nevertheless kept the love letters of a woman he despised for their possible future value to him . . . a man with a strange streak of honesty who was capable of playing a scene like an accomplished actor . . . a loving father who permitted himself to murder two people.

"No, I didn't owe him anything," Ellery said, "but he wasn't the only one involved. And no one knew that better than Carroll. The afternoon that the answer came to me, while we were waiting for the jury to come in, I told Mrs. Carroll I couldn't save her husband, that it was too late. Carroll was the only one present who knew what I meant. He knew I meant it was too late for *him*, that I couldn't save him because I knew he was guilty. And when I put it up to him, he gave me to understand that I wasn't to give him away. It wasn't for his own sake—he knew the verdict the jury was going to bring in. He knew he was already a dead man.

"And so I respected his last request. I couldn't save him, but I could save his family's memories of him. This way Helena Carroll and little Breck and Louanne will always think John Carroll died the victim of a miscarriage of justice." Ellery shucked his topcoat and headed for his bedroom. "How could I deny them that comfort?"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HENRY SLESAR**

TITLE: ***The Crooked Road***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A doctor's personal report on his "recent experience with sodium pentothal"—the so-called "truth serum" . . .*

IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT A REport on my recent experience with sodium pentothal would be welcomed by the medical fraternity, despite the unfortunate circumstances involved. So much controversy has centered on the efficacy of the so-called "truth serums" that even this minor contribution may be of value.

The author makes no claim that the results achieved have any research significance, since the experiment was hardly conducted under controlled conditions. However, in order to appreciate whatever results were obtained, it is necessary to discuss the personal problem which led to the experiment.

To begin with, I must state categorically that I am an extremely jealous man. When I first met Caroline Leach, I found myself in the difficult position of being wildly jealous of her husband. Her husband, of course, was Dr. Collingwood Leach, chief resident physician of St. Marks, under whose able guidance I rose to whatever eminence I have enjoyed in the profession.

Dr. Leach, now deceased, was then some fifteen years Caroline's senior, and a mutual attraction swiftly developed between Caroline and myself. Naturally, out of respect for Dr. Leach, I attempted to be as circumspect as possible about my fondness for his wife, but it soon became clear that the situation was unendurable. Caroline and I began a series of clandestine meetings, which terminated only when I was in a position to set up private practice. It was then that Caroline asked for her freedom which, after some bitterness and recrimination, Dr. Leach granted.

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Caroline and I were married as soon as the divorce was final, and the year that followed was, I can safely say, the happiest of my life. My practice, in lower Manhattan, flourished beyond the expectations of any young physician. I admit to a consuming zeal for my work, a zeal which perhaps equaled my passion for Caroline. And there, I believe, was the real source of the tribulation which began after that blissful first year.

Caroline, having sacrificed the security and ease of her first marriage, started demanding my attention to an almost unreasonable degree. It wasn't that I was loathe to bestow these attentions; it was merely that my work required more of my time than Caroline wished. Dr. Leach, who had been more of an administrator than a practicing physician, had managed to perform his duties within conventional hours, and Caroline expected me to do the same; but this was quite impossible. As a result, she became annoyed and even pettish. This I could have withstood. However, in the middle of our second year of matrimony, I began to suspect that her annoyance had taken a more serious turn—toward the crooked road of infidelity.

Equanimity is easy for me now; it is hard to describe the mood which possessed me when that black word first crossed my mind. Even after our marriage vows had been sealed, I had been subject to uncontrollable spasms of jealousy. A smile in the wrong direction was enough to increase the rate of my pulse; a casual compliment would raise my blood pressure; an unexplained lateness would bring me close to apoplexy. But the syndrome of jealousy is well known; suffice to say that my worst fear in life was that one day Caroline would relive the experience of being unfaithful to her husband.

I never had conclusive evidence about my wife's defection. They were little things, magnified by my anxiety. One morning, for example, a letter arrived in the mail and was snatched from my hand before I could even note the return address. When I pressed Caroline for an explanation, she merely laughed and said that it was a reply to a mail-order request she had made regarding my birthday present. Sure enough, I received my present by mail—a handsome leather physician's bag; but I was never sure that the two events were really connected.

Another day, an abundance of roses were delivered to our door anonymously. Caroline insisted that it was a mistake, but the odor of the flowers was noxious to me for the entire week.

On another evening there was a telephone call from a strange man. When he heard my male response, he grumbled "Wrong number," and quickly hung up. Caroline flushed deeply when I told her; I could have sworn it was the tint of guilt.

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Little things, certainly. In my more rational moments I added them up and the total came to nothing; other times, the sum was too awful to contemplate. I considered confronting her with my accusations; but such is the tortured nature of jealousy that I actually preferred the agony of ignorance.

Eventually, of course, we began to quarrel—it would have been a miracle if we had been able to maintain the idyllic roles of that first year. The quarreling only made things worse, for now there were nights when I would return from a tour of duty to find the house empty. Where had she been? It was always the movies, she insisted. Caroline, whatever her charms, had never been strong on invention. Always the movies, she said.

My decision to use sodium pentothal as a means of satisfying my terrible doubt came about in a peculiar fashion. One evening in late fall Caroline returned from the "movies" to find me in a condition not usual for a physician. It had been a chilly wet night, and I had had the sad experience that day of losing a patient at St. Marks; the combination had led me to seek a little artificial cheer.

I was not drunk, you understand —I have not been since my student days; but I was certainly exhibiting some of the effects of alcohol. It was the perfect set of circumstances for a quarrel, and quarrel we did; and for the first time I openly mentioned my suspicions. Instead of replying, Caroline slammed out of the house and didn't return until two a.m. In the morning she had pneumonia.

Normally, the ethics of my profession would have required me to seek the services of another physician to treat my wife's illness. Under the circumstances, however, I felt justified in caring for her myself.

In some strange way her condition seemed to heal the breach between us, and she was meek and loving during the time of her confinement. But on the day the crisis passed I happened to come across an article concerning narco-analysis in the *Journal-Lancet*—and the idea was born.

"Truth serum" is, of course, a misnomer. The drugs used to induce narcosis are not a serum, nor do they necessarily produce "truth." However, it has been previously established that narco-analysis can be an important adjunct in psychiatric examination. In 1953 a survey had been conducted at Yale University and the investigators reported that "only individuals who have conscious and unconscious reasons for doing so are inclined to confess and yield to interrogation under drug influence." Nevertheless, narco-analysis has been successfully employed to elicit unguarded replies from many thousands of neurotic and criminal patients.

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Please do not assume that the decision to use a narcotic drug without permission and without clinical necessity—and on a woman to whom I had pledged the most sacred vows of our society—was an easy or casual decision. The white knight of my medical conscience and the green dragon of my jealousy fought a titanic battle within me.

But fire conquered the sword, and that evening I told Caroline that I was going to administer some medication which would hasten her recovery.

I used a solution of thiopental sodium, with 30 mg. of anhydrous sodium carbonate added to each 0.5 Gm. of sodium pentothal as a buffer. After she was brought to the surgical plane of esthesia, I allowed her to regain the senses of hearing and speech. Then I began my interrogation.

"Caroline, can you hear what I'm saying?"

"Yes, I can hear you."

"I want you to answer a question, Caroline, and I want you to be absolutely truthful."

"Yes."

"Are you unfaithful, Caroline?"

She stirred uncomfortably at this point, and her pulse beat increased markedly.

I repeated the question.

"Yes," she said.

I was in need of sedation myself when I heard her reply, but I managed to continue.

"Who is the man, Caroline?"

"No, no," she said, squirming in the bed, obviously resisting even the potent force of the drug.

I asked her again, and began to notice alarming palpitations; a cold sweat dappled her face. Fearing that her anxiety would negate the narcotic influence, I switched my line of attack.

"Where do you meet this man, Caroline? Is it at the movies?"

"Yes."

I cursed my stupidity in asking this leading question. One of the troublesome aspects of narco-analysis was the willingness of subjects to supply the interrogator with the answer he seems to be seeking. I tried more objective questioning.

"Tell me where you saw this man last."

She caught her breath. "It was . . . in a restaurant."

"What was the name of the restaurant?"

"Vincenti's."

"Did you have dinner at Vincenti's?"

"Yes."

"Then where did you go?"

"Please," she moaned.

"Weren't you afraid of discovery?"

"No . . . my husband . . . was at the hospital."

My eyes filled—not with tears of sadness, but with the burning tears of hatred.

"Then where did you go?" I said coldly.

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"Please."

"Where did you go then?"

"To his apartment!"

"How long did you stay?"

"An hour . . . two hours . . ."

"And what did you do?" I asked, no longer dispassionate or calm. "What did you *do* in those hours, Caroline?"

She was now sobbing. I knew that I was defeating my purpose by my own emotional response, but I no longer cared.

"Is he your lover, Caroline?" I cried.

"Yes!" she screamed. *"Yes!"*

I pause here for a moment to report some clinical sensations. Not Caroline's; I was beyond objective analysis of my subject. The sensations were my own.

I entered a state which might best be described as a hallucinatory. My body seemed to divide in two, one half devoted to action, the other to observation. The action-half went calmly to the medical supply closet that I keep in my study and removed a small bottle containing strychnine; the observation-half watched closely as I filled the hypodermic with 40 cc's and made the injection in my patient's right arm. Then the two halves came together with such force that the collision caused unconsciousness . . .

When I awoke, Caroline was dead. After some reflection on what I had done, I telephoned the police.

The actual result of this narco-analysis experiment wasn't clear to me until several days after my arrest. It was during a conversation with my attorney that I realized the strange trick that the drug had played on both Caroline and myself, and it is this capricious action of the narcotic which is my chief contribution to the understanding of narco-analysis.

When I described the interrogation to my lawyer, he pointed out that the restaurant known as Vincenti's had been closed for almost a year, and that Caroline could not possibly have met her lover there. Indeed, there was no lover at all; the rendezvous she described had taken place two years before—and the man had been myself.

NEXT MONTH . . .

GEORGE HARMON COXE's *A Neat and Tidy Job*

MARGERY ALLINGHAM's *Family Affair*

ANTHONY BOUCHER's *The Ultimate Clue*

BILLY ROSE's *Beyond All Doubt*

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a new story by

WILLIAM O'FARRELL

Lady of the Old School

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**WILLIAM O'FARRELL**
TITLE:	***Lady of the Old School***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	Southern California
TIME:	This year
COMMENTS:	*At the age of 72, Miss Alice Murchison still lived by the standards of conduct considered proper for young ladies of good family at the turn of the century . . .*

AT SEVENTY-TWO MISS ALICE MURchison still lived by the standards of conduct considered proper for girls of good family in the years immediately preceding and following the turn of the century. In effect, she was still the same prim child: fragile, timid, and incredibly innocent, blushing whenever the more worldly members of her budding generation teased her by humming *Alice Ben Bolt*—a song about a frightened young lady who was given to bursting into tears at the slightest provocation.

This they had done on every possible occasion. It had been particularly painful because Miss Alice had loved the song and still did, favoring it even above *Glow, Little Glow Worm* and half a dozen others which she played correctly with feeling indicated rather than expressed, on a harp which had been given her on her thirteenth birthday.

The harp had now come to its final resting place in a corner of her immaculate living-room in a rented house overlooking the sea in Southern California. Miss Alice, growing a little feeble, knew herself to be incapable of another major move. She wanted to be left in peace, and she carefully avoided any friction with her landlady, Mrs. Myra Lambert, who lived across the street.

This was not always easy because Myra Lambert was figuratively a

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drowning woman. She floated precariously in a sea of apprehension and frustration, keeping her head above the surface by grabbing hold of anything—houses, mortages, people, even empty soda pop bottles, anything that, when and if it ever became necessary, could be turnd into life-sustaining cash.

Myra was also a confirmed and energetic remodeler—one of those people who no sooner have a house built and the furniture suitably arranged than they must tear down walls and build again, cramming two rental units into space formerly occupied by one. The house across the street had originally been a private residence. Its position on a hillside, however, had suggested the possibility of turning it into a duplex, one fairly large apartment above the other.

Having done this, Myra had immediately seen another angle by which her income could be increased. She was now splitting the lower apartment in two, and the noise and litter attendant on construction had been fraying Miss Alice's nerves for months. The very thought of complaining made her slightly ill but, if the situation continued, she would have to. And she was afraid of what might happen if she did.

One morning in July, Miss Alice was having her tea and toast when the telephone rang. The instrument was at her side. She picked it up. The strident voice of her landlady crackled in her ear. "That you, Alice? Listen, dear, I'm at my place down in the canyon. The tenant's moving out today and he owes me twenty-eight dollars for utilities. Do me a favor, will you? Feed Antoine."

Antoine was Myra Lambert's cat, a white Angora the size of a small goat, and with a goat's malicious eyes. Miss Alice was afraid of him.

"But Mrs. Lambert," she said, "I don't know where—"

"Key's in the window box and you'll find plenty of tuna in the kitchen cupboard. Give him half a can and put the rest in the refrigerator."

"Well—"

"Thanks, dear. 'Bye now," Myra said.

"Mrs. Lambert—" Miss Alice was gratified to hear the firmness that had come into her voice. "That pile of rubbish, old cement, and boards—it's most unsightly. I do wish you'd have it taken away."

"The sanitation people will pick it up."

"Oh, but they won't! They collect garbage every Monday and Thursday, combustible materials every Tuesday, and cans every third Friday. They won't touch cement. The man told me so."

"Did you offer him a tip?"

"Of course not!"

"Well, do that, dear. Give him a couple of dollars. He'll probably pick it up a week from Friday."

"But in the meantime—" Miss

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Alice was unable to cope with the brazen suggestion that she pay to have her landlady's trash carted away. Her firmness was fast evaporating.

"Yes, dear?" Myra prompted.

Miss Alice drew a deep breath. "In the meantime it's on my lawn. Couldn't you tell your man, that Joe Something-or-other, to keep it on your side of the street?"

"Well, you know Joe," Myra said a little vaguely. "It's hard to reason with him. If I were you I'd just call the Department of Sanitation and take a stand with them." A click broke the connection and after a moment Miss Alice hung up too.

She rose and went slowly to the door. She opened it and crossed the lawn to the street, averting her eyes from the litter on both sides of the walk. The key to Myra Lambert's house was in the window box, and Miss Alice unlocked the front door and entered a haphazardly furnished living-room.

There was no sign of Antoine. It wasn't until she had entered the kitchen that the huge cat leaped unexpectedly through the open window and sat on the sink glaring at her with yellow, evil eyes. Miss Alice, who had stifled a scream at the animal's sudden appearance, found her hands trembling so violently that she could hardly open the cupboard door.

The inside of the cupboard was a mess. The only food she could find were tins and tins of tuna, and these had been jumbled in among cans of paint and fly spray, bottles of weed killer and various types of disinfectant. She washed a can opener and used it on a tin of tuna. Half the fish she put on a plate and placed on the floor; the rest she put in the refrigerator. Then she left the house as quickly as she could.

It was while she was returning the key to the window box that indignation began to build up in her. *Why, I'm being imposed upon!* she thought. *I pay Mrs. Lambert an exorbitant rental to be left alone and she bullies me into doing things that I don't want to do. It isn't fair!*

She paused to look over a waist-high wall at the construction under way in the downstairs apartment. Directly below where she stood, the roof of what had been a bedroom had been torn off; it was Myra Lambert's intention to cement the floor, screen the room, and make a lanai of it.

Some of the bedroom furniture was still there, and Miss Alice, looking straight down, saw a couch in its accustomed corner. Joe Something-or-other was a slow worker; she estimated that he would be on the job at least another month. Thirty more days of Mrs. Lambert's loud directing voice trying to outshout the roar of a cement mixer and all the other grating noises people make when they remodel houses that would have been better left as they were!

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Miss Alice turned back toward her own house. Again she saw the litter on her lawn.

Joe had packed the broken cement and lumber into cardboard cartons, and it didn't look too bad from Mrs. Lambert's place. That made Miss Alice even more indignant. She stood for thirty seconds letting her anger grow—and then, without having reached a conscious decision to do so, she went to work. One minute she was standing by the wall above the roofless bedroom, the next she was on the far side of the street—*her* side—tugging at heavy cartons, dragging them away. She was panting heavily when the last of the debris was planted on her landlady's lawn.

At that moment a car driven by George Lambert, Mrs. Lambert's divorced husband, stopped at the curb.

"Seen Myra, Miss Murchison?"

"She's at the canyon house, Mr. Lambert. I just talked to her on the telephone."

"Thanks." George Lambert shifted the gears of his old car and chugged away. He reflected on the curious laws of the State of California as he headed for the road that would take him down into the canyon.

California is a community property state with a difference. The difference lies in the stipulation that, if one of the parties to a marriage is proved guilty of adultery, all bets are off. The other—the presumably injured party—is awarded all property formerly held in common. And in some cases, as in that of Myra's suit against George, alimony as well. Laws like this, enacted with the noblest of intentions, often lead to disaster. Laid head to upturned feet, the trail of corpses that has been the result of this particular law would stretch from Pershing Square to Forest Lawn.

George swung his car into the canyon road and parked behind Myra's white Cadillac which stood beside a well-remembered driveway gate. He had good reason to remember the gate. Under Myra's personal supervision he had made and hung the thing himself. George had fought in two wars and been decorated five times; he was, or had been, an excellent businessman. His courage and hard-headedness—call it ruthlessness if you like—had been proved. But something had gone out of him when he had married Myra. He had slipped in stature, become a taker-of-orders, an unpaid servant, a silently resentful hanger of driveway gates. He sighed and got out of the car. Then he heard the voice of his ex-wife.

It came brassily from the far side of the gate. She was talking to her tenant, a young man named Vince Terhune. "I'm disappointed, Vince. I never thought you'd try to run out on a debt. You owe me twenty-eight dollars for utilities."

"I don't owe you a cent," her tenant said. "You promised me

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thirty-five dollars for installing a shower bath. Well, you can forget the seven bucks I have coming. I just want out."

"Nothing's holding you." George could picture Myra's shrug. "But if you don't pay up I'll have to attach your car."

"Try to find it."

There was a crackle of paper as Myra produced and read an address on Euclid Avenue. "Your new home. You paid a month's rent yesterday. I'm sorry for you, Vince. I know your boss. He doesn't approve of deadbeats."

"You win." The young man sounded tired and desperate. "I'll find the money somehow. You'll have it this afternoon."

"Fine. Two thirty at my house? Joe and I have to cement the new lanai. And Vince—"

"What is it?"

"You'll feel ever so much better after you've paid me. Dishonesty only breeds unhappiness. We all get exactly what's coming to us in this life."

"You have my sympathy, Myra, in that case," he said.

George opened the gate. Vince Terhune was climbing into his car. Only a few years before Myra's tenant had played tackle for U.C.L.A. and his nickname had been more than a sportswriter's exercise in obvious alliteration. "Terrible" Terhune had plowed through three years of college football as destructively as a Sherman tank.

But Myra had licked him. He looked at George and flushed, and quickly looked away. "Hi, George," he said. Myra swung around.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

He waited until Vince had backed out of the drive. "A man served me a paper. It says I owe you alimony for three months."

"True."

"How do you expect me to give you money when you've taken all the money I need to make money with?"

"I don't know."

"I've got exactly two dollars and ten cents to my name."

She shrugged. "You realize it's out of my hands, of course?"

"I don't realize anything of the kind. Give me a break, Myra. I need a chance to get back on my feet."

Myra looked thoughtful. If George had not known her so well he might have been fooled. But Myra never thought. She reacted to stimuli, that was all. She was a huskily built woman who once had had a certain peasantlike prettiness. But time and circumstances had worn it away, leaving the skeletal bones of her character exposed. Myra was convinced the world was out to skin her. She was determined to get her licks in first.

"I'm sorry, George. The court awarded me a hundred dollars a month," she said. "You shouldn't ask me to ignore the decision of the court."

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"So I owe you three hundred, and there's another hundred due next week. How do you expect me to raise it?"

"That's your problem, dear. But I'm not unreasonable. Bring me half of it this afternoon and I'll let the balance ride a couple of days."

"Suppose I don't? Suppose I can't?"

"What a silly question!" she said. "You know what the consequences would be."

George knew very well. "Myra, you're a vicious, selfish woman."

"If you really knew me, George, you wouldn't be so rude. It's just that other people are always trying to take advantage of me. Don't you try it, dear. I'll be home about two thirty." Myra's eyes flicked past him. "You're late, Joe," she said.

George turned to see Joe Cramm, Myra's handyman, shuffling toward them. Joe was a lucky, cadaverous man who looked as though he'd been thrown together on a badly organized assembly line. He was subject to fits of garrulousness which alternated with moods of gloomy introspection, and this may have been one of the factors which once had saved him from a term in San Quentin for manslaughter. A kindly judge had committed him to a State Hospital instead; and the end result was that, work being hard for him to find, he was willing to put in long hours for substandard pay. This made him, for Myra, the ideal employee.

"Mr. Terhune has moved," she told him. "I want the whole house thoroughly cleaned."

" 'Morning, Joe," George said.

The handyman included both of them in a surly nod and went on toward the house. Myra turned back cheerfully to George. " 'Bye now, dear. See you this afternoon."

George went back to his car. Myra watched him drive away, then followed Joe into the house. He was sweeping the kitchen.

"You can do that later. I want to get the fireplace cleaned out first," she said.

He dropped the broom and left it where it had fallen. He went into the living-room, removed the fire screen. His lips moved silently as he worked and, if Myra had been a lip reader, she and Joe Cramm would have parted company instantly. She would have got rid of him if it had meant cleaning the fireplace herself.

The handyman had what he believed to be a legitimate complaint. Three big legitimate complaints, if you added them all up and passed over any number of minor irritations and injustices that would have raised the dander of a less easy-going man. The month before, for a promised fifty dollars, he had moved her car port—and found out later that three contracting companies had refused to touch the job for less than a hundred and eighty. That was the first complaint. The second was that, after thirty days,

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she still hadn't handed over the fifty. He would have to wait until Miss Murchison paid her next month's rent. Right now Myra was broke.

That's what she'd said, anyway, and Joe at the time had been staring at her bosom, at the top of a fat roll of bills she had tucked in her brassière!

But it was the business about the wheelbarrow that really got him down. He'd needed one to do some work for her, and there was a man down the street who would let him have an old barrow for a buck a day. She'd given him the buck and the man had told Joe that for four bucks more he could keep the thing for good. So Myra had said, "Buy it. I'll make it up to you later." So Joe had put up four bucks of his own cash and that had been two weeks ago, and she hadn't made it up. Worse than that, she'd latched onto the wheelbarrow, kept it locked in her garage. When he wanted to use it he had to ask her as if it were a favor.

"What on earth are you muttering about, Joe?" she asked.

He growled incomprehensibly.

"Well, hurry up with that fireplace. We've got a lot of work to do," she said.

The cement for the lanai floor had been promised for early that afternoon. At one o'clock Myra pulled Joe off the job and sent him up to her house to wait for the delivery. "I'll finish up here. When the cement comes you can start right in."

"How about lunch?"

"Take something from the refrigerator and fix your own. You know where I keep the key," she said.

Arriving at the hillside house, Joe was surprised to see that all the trash he had painstakingly piled on the far side of the street was now stacked on Myra's side. A further surprise awaited him when, taking the key from the window box, he opened the front door. George Lambert and Vince Terhune were in the living-room. They looked as low-down mean as Joe Cramm felt. George said, "Come in, sucker," and "Welcome to the club," Vince said.

"She told me I was to get something to eat out of the ice box," Joe mumbled.

George leaned forward in his chair. "I'll lay you a small bet. The only food you'll find is tuna for the cat. That's what she eats herself." He turned to Vince as Joe went into the kitchen. "My correspondent in the divorce case was neither beautiful nor intelligent, but she liked good food. Her cooking would have made a Cordon Bleu turn green."

Vince nodded his sympathetic understanding. "Myra lowered the boom on me this morning."

"I know. Did you raise the twenty-eight bucks?"

"No."

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George sighed. "You and I and poor Joe Cramm are fellow-passengers in the same sinking boat."

Joe came back glumly from the kitchen. "You're right, Mr. Lambert. Nothing but cat food. Tuna and paint and weed killer and more tuna." He sat down and looked around the room. "What's she got to live for anyway? She ain't even got a television set."

There was silence for a moment. Then George said softly, "The cat she had before Antoine drank a little of her weed killer. In twenty seconds it was dead."

A longer silence followed during which the three men—a winner of five decorations for legalized killing, a dealer-out of mayhem to opposite backfields, and a former violent inmate of a hospital for the criminally insane—avoided looking at each other. They all sat staring at the floor. Then Vince Terhune got quietly to his feet.

"Excuse me for a minute, please," he said.

He went into the kitchen. Returning after a couple of minutes, he resumed his former seat. More time passed and then Joe Cramm stood up. He, too, entered the kitchen. It seemed to him that there was less weed killer in the bottle now than there had been when he had seen it last. He did what he had come to do and went back to the living-room.

George Lambert was the last to excuse himself. The other two watched him disappear into the kitchen. He located the weed killer without difficulty and was not surprised to find the bottle less than half full. It was only about a third full when he left.

At five minutes after two Myra Lambert parked her white Cadillac at the curb in front of her house. She saw the pile of rubbish on her lawn and blew the horn. The front door opened and Joe Cramm came out.

"Cement ain't been delivered yet," he said.

Myra indicated the trash-filled cartons. "Who carried that stuff over here?"

"Couldn't tell you."

"Well, I want it all taken back to where it was," she said.

She got out of the car as Joe started lugging the broken cement across the street and restacking it on Miss Alice's front lawn. She went into the house. Her ex-tenant and ex-husband were sitting in the living-room. Both got up courteously as she came in.

"You're early," she said. "You'll have to wait a minute while I have my lunch."

She left the room, and George and Vince did not sit down again. Imperceptibly they edged toward the arch that opened on the little dining-room. Listening, their heads were cocked in the direction of the kitchen. They heard the refrigerator door open and bang shut. A plate clattered. There was a rattle

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of silverware. Then they heard nothing for a while.

The front door opened and Joe came in to join them. As he, too, settled into a listening position, the silence was broken by a sudden crash. They all moved quickly through the dining-room into the kitchen.

Myra sat on a high stool at the sink. In front of her was a plate that, a few minutes before, had been heaped with tuna and which she had obviously just emptied. Her eyebrows lifted as they came running in.

"What's the matter?"

George stammered, "We—we heard a noise—"

"That was the frying pan," she said. "It fell."

A frying pan was on the floor. They studied it gravely. Vince said, "Did you enjoy your lunch?"

She shrugged. "It was food. I eat to keep my strength up, not for pleasure."

"I hope you're feeling well?" George asked.

"I'm sleepy." She frowned at Vince. "That's your fault," she said. "I had to get up at dawn to keep you from sneaking out. Give me my twenty-eight dollars and let me take a nap."

"I don't have it, Myra."

"How about you, George."

"Well, Myra—"

"You're broke, too?"

"Maybe if I had more time—"

"You both have a couple of hours," she said. "I'm going to lie down for a while. I'll call the sheriff as soon as I get up." She turned to Joe. "Wake me when the man with the cement comes. Now all of you get out."

She watched them go, noting their common air of perplexed furtiveness; but she was not particularly interested. When the front door had closed, she descended an inner stairway to the lower apartment and went into the roofless bedroom she was having converted into a lanai. It was fairly private there—no one could see her except from above. A couch was still over in a corner. She crossed to it, more tired than she had realized, lay down, and closed her eyes.

Outside on the street the three men had paused beside Joe's pickup truck. They were watching the house, but gradually the focus of their attention shifted. Their heads and eyes turned, and suspiciously they studied one another.

George said it first, in a voice so low that it was practically a whisper. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but did we or did we not have a sort of unspoken understanding?"

"You're not wrong," Vince said.

Joe nodded. "Couldn't be righter if you tried."

"Then what happened? I swear that cat hardly stuck its tongue in the stuff before it rolled over and curled up its toes. It doesn't make sense—unless . . ."

"Unless what?" Vince prompted.

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"Unless we all reneged. Tell me the truth, Vince. When you were in the kitchen did you . . . *do* anything?"

Vince hesitated. "Did you?"

"I'll let you have it straight," George said. "I took the weed killer and poured a jolt of it into the sink. I was hoping—"

"I know," Vince said. "I did the same thing. I was hoping too."

They turned to Joe. He sighed and turned away. His lips moved, silently at first, but after a moment they began to form distinguishable words.

"Chicken, all of us," he muttered. "Just plain chicken. Couldn't go through with it in a million years." He observed as though from far away a boy on a bicycle coming down the street. "Might as well give up and go on home to roost."

The boy on the bicycle was delivering the afternoon paper. Passing Miss Alice's house, he hurled a folded copy. It plunked against her door. She heard the sound, opened the door, picked up the paper. Straightening, she caught sight of the rubbish piled once more on her front lawn.

She stiffened. "Well, really, after all—!" she said aloud. She tossed her head—a phrase descriptive of a gesture forgotten now for nearly half a century—and walked with furious dignity across the street.

Miss Alice pushed the bell beside Mrs. Lambert's door. There was no answer. She pressed her thumb against the bell and held it there. The door remained shut; there was no sign of life. Reluctantly Miss Alice turned back toward the street.

A sound stopped her, attracting her attention. It was a kind of rasping gurgle, not immediately identifiable as a snore. But Miss Alice placed the direction from which it came, and she crossed to the waist-high wall. She looked over the wall and down, and saw Mrs. Lambert stretched out on a couch in a corner of the unfinished lanai. Mrs. Lambert lay on her back. Her eyes were shut and her mouth was open wide.

Miss Alice, for some reason, found the sight intriguing. She became so fascinated by it that she was not aware of the arrival of the yellow truck with the strange-looking revolving drum mounted on its rear—not aware until the man who drove it spoke.

"Where you want it, lady?" the man asked.

Miss Alice turned. "I beg your pardon. Where do I want what?"

"Cement. Nice fresh cement. This ain't a Good Humor truck, you know."

"That—that device"—Miss Alice indicated the drum—"is filled with fresh cement?"

"That's right."

"And you want a place to put it?"

"You're real bright, lady. That's exactly what I'm looking for."

Miss Alice studied the drum. She had no knowledge of mechanics

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but it was apparent, from its position on the truck, that it was designed to tilt and drop cement into attendant wheelbarrows.

"Why," she said, "I think it might be a good idea if you backed your truck in right where I am standing and dropped your cement over the wall."

"You're paying for it. You got a right to have it where you want it," the driver said.

A few minutes later Myra Lambert awoke to the startled realization that she could not breathe. She thought at first that it was a return of her asthma but, trying to sit up, she found that she could not move. Something wet, heavy, and airless was pinning her to the couch.

The only part of her body over which she had control was her right hand. She wiggled it frantically until the fingers came to rest. When Antoine sniffed them curiously Myra did not even know the cat was there.

From the waist-high wall above, three men looked down into the roofless bedroom. They saw a hand projecting from a pile of fresh cement. They watched a white Angora sniff the hand and tiptoe delicately away.

Then one by one they followed the cat's example. They tiptoed back to their respective cars as, from the house across the street, came the soft plunking of a harp. It played, and an old lady sang an old, old favorite in a sweet, uncertain voice.

"Oh, don't you remember sweet
Alice Ben Bolt,
Sweet Alice with hair so brown,
Who wept with delight when
you gave her a smile
And trembled with fear at your
frown?"

Miss Alice Murchison still lived by the standards of conduct considered proper for girls of good family in the years immediately preceding and following the turn of the century. Those were stirring times. Between 1901 and 1905 there were recorded 541 lockouts and 13,964 strikes. In June of 1901 an anarchist named Leon Czolgosz assassinated President McKinley, and in January of that same year Carrie Nation made her first hatchet raid on a saloon in Wichita, Kansas. And there was another faultlessly reared young lady who, toward the close of the nineteenth century, when Miss Alice was an impressionable child, is supposed to have made good use of a hatchet. Displeased with her family, Lizzie Borden is believed to have got rid of them in a manner equally as effective but much more messy than the one employed by Miss Alice in dispatching Myra Lambert.

Murder and a ladylike demeanor do not necessarily preclude one another. We live nowadays in a world of half men and half women —but Miss Alice Murchison was born of a generation of giants.

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**EDMUND CRISPIN**
TITLE:	***Too Clever for Scotland Yard***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Assistant Commissioner, C.I.D.
LOCALE:	Nottsville Prison, England
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*How a man, alone in his prison cell, was murdered—the "impossible crime," the "locked room mystery," with a new and most ingenious solution . . . Cheers!*

From The Assistant Commissioner
Criminal Investigation Department
Metropolitan Police

To H.M. Secretary for Home Affairs

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

New Scotland Yard,
London, S.W. 1
May 12th, 1960

Dear Mr. Clunes,

Thank you for your letter dated yesterday. Needless to say, the nature of the questions regarding the Wynter case which Opposition Members are proposing to ask in the House of Commons comes as no particular surprise to me. I have in fact dealt somewhat disingenuously with this matter, as you will see; but to suggest that I have avoided arresting Gillian on account of my personal acquaintance with him is absurd.

The outline of the case which follows will, I hope, be sufficient to secure a withdrawal of the questions. If this fails, I shall of course be glad to offer the Members concerned a full and free opportunity to question

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me, as well as the officers who have conducted the investigation, in whatever fashion they think fit.

Their suspicions are the more ironical in that Gillian was actually arrested yesterday morning, on my personal instructions. Since the Department of Public Prosecutions regards the evidence against him as insufficient, the arrest was made without a warrant; and within a couple of hours Gillian was inevitably once again a free man.

My action did, however, succeed in its intended purpose: Gillian and Mrs. Wynter had planned to be married yesterday afternoon; as a result of the scene that occurred in my office the marriage will not now take place.

You will say, and rightly, that it is no business of the police to discourage people who wish to marry murderers. Nonetheless, when one partner is completely unsuspicious, there is, I believe, a good deal to be said on humane grounds for at least dropping a hint. In fact, the simple ruse we employed succeeded handsomely, thereby confirming the theory we had formed as to the only possible method by which this perplexing murder can have been committed.

Gillian's arrest was so contrived that Mrs. Wynter would be with him at the time; she was "allowed" to accompany him to Scotland Yard, and on arrival both of them were brought to my office. Also present were Superintendent Coleano (in charge of the case), Detective-Inspector Pugh (who made the arrest), and a shorthand writer (P. C. Clements). Despite Mrs. Wynter's urgings, Gillian declined to send for a solicitor; his attitude was fatalistic throughout, and he looked ill.

I need hardly say that if Gillian's arrest had been anything other than a trick there would have been no question of my confronting him personally. As it was, I was able to use our previous acquaintance as a pretext for the meeting: I told him, quite untruthfully, that I had just returned from leave, and was anxious for old times' sake to hear an account of the circumstances which had resulted in the Deputy A.C.'s ordering his arrest, and to look into the matter in person; and it is the measure of the queer, apathetic state he was in that he apparently swallowed this preposterous tale without turning a hair.

The proceedings opened with Colleano's giving me a summary of the case. From our point of view this was mere camouflage; but it is necessary to repeat it here for the purpose of clarifying what happened subsequently.

Approximately two years ago Dr. Harold Wynter, a general practitioner working in the Somerset town of Midcastle, was tried for, and convicted of, the manslaughter of a patient through gross negligence. The

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evidence against him was by no means decisive, but both judge and jury seem to have been influenced by the fact that the doctor himself was a morphine addict. He was adjudged guilty and sentenced to imprisonment for three years.

At Nottsville Prison—to which Gillian had a year previously been appointed Governor—Wynter's first few weeks were spent in the infirmary, where he was weaned of his addiction before being transferred to the cells. Very shortly afterwards, however, he began to suffer from attacks of angina pectoris. Accordingly he was excused from all serious exertion; and in addition—since he proved a model prisoner—was allowed a cell to himself, so that he mingled with the other prisoners only on the occasions when he took light exercise in the yard.

His wife, Ellen Wynter, wrote to him regularly and seems to have visited him as often as she could; these visits were, however, restricted in number owing to the fact that for financial reasons she had been obliged to take a job some considerable distance away.

In the ordinary course of things—taking into account remissions for good conduct—Wynter would have been released in October of this year.

On April 23rd he died in his cell.

This was discovered when luncheon was brought to him at noon on that day. In the absence of contra-indications, the death was ascribed to the angina—for although a man suffering from this complaint may, and often does, live on for a great many years, there is no guarantee that any single attack may not finish him. As with all prison deaths, however, an inquest was held. But there was no post mortem, since none seemed to be called for, and on April 27th Wynter was buried in the prison cemetery, his death being certified as due to his heart disease.

There the matter might well have rested. Three days later, however, we received here at Scotland Yard an anonymous letter which accused Gillian of having poisoned Wynter with a plant spray containing nicotine; Gillian's motive, the writer added, was infatuation with Wynter's wife.

I myself ordered that this accusation be investigated, and there proved to be sufficient plausibility in it to justify us in exhuming Wynter's body. The stomach was shown to contain a small but sufficiently lethal quantity of nicotine; in consequence of this, a full-scale examination of the circumstances was at once put in hand.

The writer of the anonymous letter was traced easily enough. He was a warder at Nottsville named Parker, who conceived himself to have a grudge against the Governor, and who purely by chance had come to hear of the irregular association which did in fact exist between Gillian and Mrs. Wynter; the nicotine, he said, was only a guess, based on the

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fact that he knew this type of plant spray was used occasionally on the Governor's shrubbery.

It was a suspiciously good guess, and Superintendent Colleano devoted plenty of time and energy to investigating whether Parker himself had opportunity or motive for poisoning Wynter. In the end, however, it was established that he had neither. A second possibility was that Wynter's death had some connection with the death of the patient he was alleged to have neglected; but this again proved unlikely, if not impossible.

To cut a long story short, the closest checking and counter-checking failed to establish a motive for Wynter's death in any of the prison staff—except Gillian.

Gillian's motive, however, was undeniably a strong one: he was in love with Mrs. Wynter. There is no doubt, by the way, that Wynter was devoted to his wife, to the extent that—in her view—he would never have agreed to divorce her; and in spite of his illness he might well have lived for many years after his release from Nottsville.

As to the manner in which Gillian and Mrs. Wynter became acquainted, that, I think, calls for no detailed description here. It is worth noting, however, that Gillian's obsession with the woman was by no means a happy one. The husband was a prisoner in his personal charge, undergoing a relatively savage sentence for a crime of which he may quite possibly have been innocent; moreover, Wynter loved his wife; and finally, he was an incurable invalid.

To a man with Gillian's record for probity these considerations may well have been horribly distressing; he himself has said that they worried him deeply—and his anxiety was naturally compounded by the fact that from the official point of view his surreptitious relationship with Mrs. Wynter was an unforgivable offence for which his resignation would certainly be demanded as soon as the truth became known. As you are aware, that resignation was tendered, and accepted, a fortnight ago.

Since Gillian is a wealthy man in his own right, his financial position will not be affected; at the same time, for a man with his long and devoted connection with the penal service, the wrench must have been considerable.

Was Gillian's passion for Mrs. Wynter sufficiently strong to override all these considerations? Unquestionably it was; and if so, we may not unreasonably assume that it was strong enough to impel him to the act of murder. He had motive, he had means.

Unfortunately, what he seems quite definitely not to have had was opportunity.

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The medical evidence as to the time of Wynter's death, and how long he took to die, is regrettably uncertain; but there is a definite consensus of opinion to the effect that Wynter could not have ingested the poison earlier than breakfast time—that is to say, 7:30 a.m. on the day of his death. It seems equally certain, however, that the nicotine was not in Wynter's breakfast; two warders (perfectly reputable men) were concerned in the serving of this, and moreover they were, as it happened, accompanied on this occasion by one of H.M. Inspectors of Prisons, who had been staying in Nottsville overnight; without going into the matter in detail, I can assure you that short of a conspiracy among these three it is absolutely impossible for the poison to have been administered in Wynter's breakfast.

But if not at this time, when? On the morning of his death Wynter did not, as it chanced, require fresh materials for the work he performed in his cell; and the result of this was that the next visit paid to him was at lunch-time—when his dead body was discovered. It is certain that between 7:30 and noon Wynter was alone in his cell in E block, and that during this period he came in contact with no one—neither with Gillian nor with anyone else.

These circumstances would seem to point either to suicide or to murder by trickery—for example, Wynter might previously have been given a preparation of nicotine under the guise of medicine, and have consumed it of his own volition some time on the morning of his death. There exists, however, an insuperable objection to both assumptions: before breakfast on that particular morning a snap search of the cells in E block was carried out. These searches are routine, but they are nevertheless thorough; and because of the recent suicide of Pickering at Tawton Prison, special attention is currently being paid to the possibility of concealed poison.

The upshot, as it applies to Wynter, you will guess: no pills or powders or capsules or fluids were found in his cell other than the small supply of trinitrini tablets which he was allowed to keep by him in case of an angina attack. Of these, at the time of the search, there were three, in a sealed container; and there is irrefutable evidence to prove that this same container was still there, still sealed and intact, when Wynter's body was discovered (it was, of course, noticed particularly for the reason that at the time Wynter's death was assumed to be the result of an angina attack sufficiently disabling to have prevented him from getting at the tablets).

Now, Gillian's last direct encounter with Wynter had taken place more than a week before the death; and on that occasion, as always, another

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nember of the prison staff was present—this precaution is so invariable n dealing with convicts that if Gillian had at any time departed from it n his dealings with Wynter, the fact must inevitably have become known) us.

How, then, can Gillian possibly have committed this murder?

Or if it was suicide, how can Gillian or anyone else possibly have sup-)lied Wynter with the means?

The three warders who conducted the search on the morning of the eath might conceivably have conspired together to make Wynter a pres-nt of poison; but in view of their excellent record this was not a possi-ility which Colleano felt able to accept so long as another, and likelier, xplanation of the circumstances remained open to him.

And such an explanation did exist.

Despite the external appearances of what thriller-writers describe as an impossible murder" or a "locked-room mystery," the ingenious yet sim-)le way in which Wynter had been murdered was easily deduced from he facts I have given above.

Unluckily, proving it in court is quite another matter. The D.P.P. has efused to sanction a prosecution, and I cannot blame them; here, I am orry to have to say, is one murderer who has been too clever for us.

In reconsidering what I have written, I realise that I have left Mrs. Wynter unduly in the background; for in returning Gillian's affection (as he admits she did) she too had cause to wish Wynter dead—a motive all he more powerful in that Gillian is a rich man, while Wynter was not. This motive, however, is offset by the fact that, on the face of it, Mrs. Wynter had even *less* chance of conveying the poison to her husband han Gillian did: the prison staff is convinced that Mrs. Wynter cannot ıave transmitted the nicotine to her husband either through the post—vhich naturally is strictly censored in Nottsville as in all prisons—or in he course of a visit; and even if this conviction were mistaken, there vould still remain the problem of how the poison thus supplied could ossibly have escaped notice during the search of Wynter's cell on the very ıorning of his death.

I return now to the scene in my office yesterday morning.

As soon as Colleano finished his account of the case, Mrs. Wynter, cutely distressed, urged that her husband's death was almost certainly suicide. She was unable to give any coherent idea of how he could ıave obtained the poison, or secreted it so effectively as to defy expert earch; but she propounded the theory that although she had never xplicitly mentioned her association with Gillian to Wynter, he might have)me to hear of it through prison rumour, emanating, presumably, from

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the warder Parker. In support of this theory she mentioned the fact—which she had learned from Colleano's account—that Wynter had destroyed all but a single page (this, presumably, having accidentally escaped his attention) of the many letters she had written him. Also—

But at this point there came an interruption—in the form of a short report addressed to me by the head of our forensic laboratory.

After scanning this report, I proceeded to read it aloud.

The single page surviving from Mrs. Wynter's correspondence with her husband has been mentioned above; and it was with this that the laboratory report was concerned. The page was a part of the last letter which Wynter received from his wife, delivered to him two days before his death. Its news and messages were commonplace; but one of Colleano's subordinates who handled it had been struck by something unusual in the texture of the paper, and had therefore passed it on to the laboratory.

The laboratory's report, though technical in its phraseology, was clear and conclusive: the paper on which the letter was written had been impregnated with a nicotine solution identical with the plant spray that Gillian used on his shrubbery.

When Mrs. Wynter heard the contents of the report, she seemed to shrivel. I make no apology for stating her reaction in such melodramatic terms, for never in all my experience have I seen anyone display such plain physical evidences of guilt.

This was satisfactory to us, of course, but an actual confession, induced by the shock, would have been more satisfactory still. The D.P.P., however, had already advised us that such a confession would be worthless in court so long as it was unsupported by other evidence, so that we were not unduly cast down by its failure to materialise. Since Mrs. Wynter remained silent, Gillian presently asked, in a bewildered fashion, for an explanation. With as much as I could manage of the air of one to whom the truth had at last miraculously been made plain, I gave it.

When Wynter's arrest became imminent (I said), he must have arranged with his wife that in the event of his being sent to prison she should keep him supplied with morphine by the medium of what are known to United States prison authorities as "satch" letters—that is, letters written on paper which has been previously saturated in the drug required. So long as these arrive regularly, the chewing and swallowing of them will keep even a confirmed addict fairly happy during the period when his normal sources of supply are cut off.

This programme Mrs. Wynter was evidently scrupulous in carrying out. But then she met Gillian, perceived his infatuation for her, noted that he was a rich man, and became aware of the existence of the plant spray in

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his potting-shed. At once she saw not only how her husband could be murdered, but also how in the process the victim could effortlessly be induced to *destroy the evidence against his murderer.*

Inevitably, her principal intention was that the death should be ascribed to the angina; and but for Parker's grudge against Gillian, that is precisely what would have happened. In case this first line of defence failed, however, Mrs. Wynter took a further precaution: she used a poison which could be linked or traced to Gillian, arguing that even if he were to be accused, arrested, and convicted, her hold over him was such that she could persuade him at least to make arrangements for keeping her in comfort during the period of his imprisonment; there might even, she thought, be a fair chance of marrying him before the warrant for his arrest was implemented.

There was little more that I needed to say. Gillian could scarcely have avoided noticing Mrs. Wynter's terror; and his own reaction, as the details of this cruel murder plot were unfolded, was everything I had hoped for—he will be careful, I am confident, never to see or communicate with the woman again.

What remained was the question of whether or not Mrs. Wynter would call our bluff. For of course it *was* bluff. The wretched Wynter undoubtedly chewed up every fragment of the final, poisonous letter precisely as he had chewed up every fragment of the preceding ones.

As you know, a confession obtained by trickery is not inadmissable in court; but we were aware that in the absence of confirmatory evidence such a confession would be hopelessly inadequate for the purpose of a prosecution. In any case, we never got it: Mrs. Wynter challenged us to produce the sheet of paper which had supposedly been subjected to laboratory examination, and to that challenge we naturally had no reply.

For a few moments Mrs. Wynter seemed confusedly to suppose that this circumstance would exonerate her in Gillian's eyes. But the signs of her guilt had been plain to him. They left Scotland Yard separately.

Like the majority of policemen I detest murderers, and accordingly it would be no sorrow to me if you were driven to expound Mrs. Wynter's guilt in detail in the privileged circumstances of the House of Commons. The Opposition, however, is notoriously solicitous regarding the sensibilities of criminals; consequently I have no doubt that if the truth is made known to them in private they will exert themselves most strenuously to prevent its going further.

Hoping that this letter supplies as much detail as you require,

I am, Sir, yours truly,

JOHN KIRKBRIDE.

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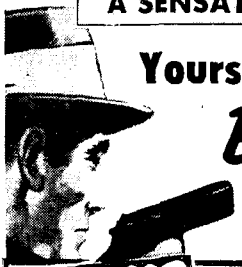

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